



**Press briefing for the launch of the
*World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision***

Statement by Mr. John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

Wednesday, 21 June 2017, 11:00 a.m.
UN Headquarters, New York

[SLIDE 1] Good morning, and thank you for being here today.

We hear frequently that people are at the centre of sustainable development. And we know that, by definition, people are at the centre of populations. From these two simple observations, it follows that an understanding of population patterns and trends will be essential for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

We can learn much by reviewing the diversity of demographic situations that exist in the world today. Some countries have large populations of children and youth, while some have an abundance of people in the working ages, and in others, the population of older persons is growing rapidly. Each of these represents a distinct stage in a shared process of demographic transition, and each presents predictable challenges and opportunities that countries can expect to encounter.

In this context, we are pleased to launch the *2017 Revision* of the *World Population Prospects*, the twenty-fifth round of official United Nations estimates and projections of the global population. The *2017 Revision* provides a comprehensive set of demographic data and indicators that can be used to assess population trends at the global, regional and national levels and to calculate other key indicators for use in monitoring progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

[SLIDE 2] Today, we are presenting a report based on these new data, entitled *World Population Prospects, the 2017 Revision: Key Findings and Advance Tables*. The report provides an initial summary of the key demographic changes that are occurring around the world. [SLIDE 3] The associated dataset includes information on the populations of 233 countries or areas of the world, which together comprise the global population.

Continued growth of the world's population

[SLIDE 4] According to the results of the *2017 Revision*, the world's population numbered nearly 7.6 billion in mid-2017, having grown by one billion people since 2005 and by two billion since 1993.

These latest projections indicate that the world will have around 8.6 billion people in 2030 and 9.8 billion in 2050. Keeping in mind that projections farther into the future are increasingly uncertain, the medium-variant projection foresees a world population of 11.2 billion people in 2100.

The statistical model that underlies these projections indicates that we can expect, with a high degree of certainty, that the global population will be between 8.4 and 8.7 billion in 2030, between 9.4 and 10.2 billion in 2050 and between 9.6 and 13.2 billion in 2100.

Considerable diversity of population trends worldwide

Population growth will not occur evenly around the world but rather will be concentrated in certain regions.

[SLIDE 5] The population of Africa is notable for its rapid pace of growth. It is anticipated that over half of global population growth between now and 2050 will take place in that region. At the other extreme, it is expected that the population of Europe will decline somewhat in the coming decades.

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.

[SLIDE 6] For the world as a whole, fertility has fallen steadily since the 1960s. In the period from 2010 to 2015, the world's woman had 2.5 births per woman over a lifetime. But this number varies widely around the world.

Amongst the different regions, Europe has the lowest fertility level, estimated at 1.6 births per woman in the most recent period, while Africa has the highest fertility, with around 4.7 births per woman. Even assuming a continued decline in fertility, given this relatively high starting point, we should anticipate a continued rapid growth of the African population, which will roughly double in size between now and 2050. Fertility levels in the other world regions are in an intermediate range between those of Africa and Europe.

When fertility falls below the threshold of 2.1 births per woman, the number of babies that arrive from year to year is insufficient to replace the parents' generation, creating a situation known as "below-replacement" fertility. Between 2010 and 2015, 46 per cent of the world's population lived in 83 countries where the fertility level was below the threshold of 2.1. Such low levels of fertility have been present in countries of Europe and North America for several decades. More recently, fertility below the replacement level has been observed also for 19 countries in Asia, 15 in Latin America and the Caribbean, three in Oceania and two in Africa.

The latest projections are based on an assumption that in the long run, fertility will converge to levels around or slightly below the replacement level of 2.1 births per

woman. Thus, for the medium-variant projection, it is assumed that fertility will continue to decline in countries or regions where fertility remains above that level, and to increase at least slightly in countries or regions where it is now at much lower levels.

Shifts in fertility and mortality reshape the population age distribution

Over the long run, the historic decline of mortality and fertility is fundamentally reshaping the age distribution of the human population. [SLIDE 7] At the global level, the population distribution by sex and age looked something like a pyramid in 1950, with a wide base representing children and youth. By 2017, the base had narrowed considerably, reflecting the declining proportion of young people in the global population. According to the medium-variant projection, the age distribution of the world's population in 2050 will more closely resemble a rocket than a pyramid. At that point, the population will be spread out much more evenly across the age range, with increasing numbers of survivors to very old ages.

[SLIDE 8] Among the world's regions today, Africa has the youngest population, as reflected in the relatively wide base of its population pyramid. In 2017, 60 per cent of the African population is under the age of 25, with only 5 per cent at ages 60 or higher.

In Europe, on the other hand, the process of population ageing is already well advanced, with roughly a quarter of the population under age 25 and another quarter aged 60 or older. The age distribution for other parts of the world falls in between these two extremes.

At each stage of the transition from younger to older populations, countries face both challenges and opportunities. Developing countries with youthful and rapidly growing populations face the considerable challenge of providing health care, education, and employment opportunities for ever-increasing numbers of children and youth. Despite these challenges, such countries can look forward to an important opportunity in the middle stage of this transition.

For a country that has been growing rapidly, a sustained reduction in the fertility level will lead, within a few decades, to a population that is highly concentrated in the working age range. This swelling of the working-age population is a temporary phenomenon that will soon be overtaken by the increase of population at older ages. While it lasts, however, the favourable age distribution can facilitate a more rapid growth of income per capita, helping to lift people out of poverty and into a more prosperous future.

On the other hand, in countries with rapidly growing older populations, the upward shift in the age distribution challenges the sustainability of social protection systems, especially old-age pension and health care systems, due to a decreasing ratio of workers to retirees. Available policy responses include measures to enlarge the size of the labour force, including through the increased participation of women,

and to raise the productivity of workers. Other approaches include increasing the official retirement age and encouraging personal savings.

Differences remain, but survival prospects are improving across the world

[SLIDE 9] Life expectancy at birth and other measures of mortality are important indicators of the health and well-being of populations. The *2017 Revision* confirms that substantial improvements in life expectancy have occurred in recent years. Globally, life expectancy at birth rose by almost 4 years, or from 67 to 71 years, from the period between 2000 and 2005 until the period between 2010 and 2015.

Although all regions shared in the gains made over those years, the largest increase was for Africa, where life expectancy at birth rose by almost 7 years in the same interval, after rising by only 2 years in the previous decade. Despite these gains, large inequalities in life expectancy persist between poorer and richer areas of the world. Life expectancy in Africa stood at 60 years in the period between 2010 and 2015, compared to 79 years in Northern America.

Like fertility, there is a considerable diversity in levels and trends of life expectancy at birth across countries and regions. Life expectancy now exceeds 80 years in some high-income countries, whereas for several African countries it remains around 50 years.

Globally, life expectancy for both sexes combined is projected to rise to around 77 years in the period between 2045 and 2050, and eventually to 83 years in the period between 2095 and 2100. Although differences in life expectancy across regions are projected to persist in future years, such differences are expected to diminish somewhat between now and 2050.

Growing significance of international migration

[SLIDE 10] Migration is the third component of demographic change, along with fertility and mortality. The migration estimates of the *2017 Revision* refer to net international migration, which is the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants for an individual country or for a group of countries.

Between 1950 and 2015, the regions of Europe, Northern America and Oceania were net receivers of international migrants, while Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean were net senders. For most of this period, the volume of the net flows of migrants between these large regions increased over time.

The latest estimates indicate that the annual net movement of persons between major regions of the world increased steadily up through the period between 2005 and 2010. For the decade between 2000 and 2010, the combined net inflows of migrants to Europe, to Northern America and to Oceania reached 3.1 million persons per year. During the period from 2010 to 2015, however, net flows of migrants between major regions of the world diminished. This contraction was

most noticeable regarding the net inflow to Europe and the net outflows from Asia and from Latin America and the Caribbean.

In most situations, the influence of international migration on the population dynamics of a country is much smaller than the impact due to the balance between births and deaths. Today, however, in some countries with low levels of fertility and ageing populations, where the number of deaths roughly equals and in some cases exceeds the number of births, a net inflow of migrants has been the primary source of population growth and in some cases has averted a decline in population size.

Also, since the age distribution of migrants is typically youthful, positive levels of net migration tend to boost the shares of the working-age population and of children and youth relative to the population at older ages. However, international migration at levels previously observed or that seem possible for the future would provide only a partial counterweight to the long-term upward shift in the age distribution.

[SLIDE 11] Before closing, I invite you to visit the website of the Population Division, www.unpopulation.org, where you will find a wealth of detailed information about populations at the national, regional and global levels. In the coming weeks and months, more information will be added to the website.

Please note that selected demographic indicators referring to individual countries or areas and to large regions of the world have been included in the *Key findings and advance tables* of the *2017 Revision*, which is available here in hard copy at the back of the room, as well as online at the Population Division's website.

[SLIDE 12] I wish to close by acknowledging the many persons and institutions whose contributions have made it possible to share these data with you here today. The Population Division wishes to thank the national statistical offices of all countries for their work in gathering and processing the underlying information and sharing their data with the United Nations. We also thank the Statistics Division – our sister division within DESA – for its work in collating and disseminating the data received from national statistical offices and other sources. Lastly, I wish to thank the staff members of the Population Division who have worked for more than a year to organize and assess the quality of input data coming from multiple sources, and then to derive global estimates and projections from those data according to a precise methodology, and finally to package and present the resulting information and indicators as part of the materials being shared today and in the coming weeks and months.

Thanks also to all of you for your attention and interest. At this point, I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.