



PRESS RELEASE

An older, more urban world population creates new challenges and opportunities for UN Member States

UN Commission on Population and Development opens today to examine 20 years of actions taken by governments to improve people's lives and address population issues

New York, 7 April—The major progress and challenges in addressing global population issues since a landmark UN conference in 1994 will be the focus of the 47th Session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, to be held at UN Headquarters from 7 to 11 April.

This year's Commission centres around a 20-year review of decisions taken at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. The outcome of the Cairo conference reflected a remarkable consensus among 179 UN Member States and others that individual human beings should be the central focus of efforts to promote social and economic development.

The Conference established that increasing access to health and education, and protecting human rights, especially those of women and adolescents, would help secure a better social and economic future and lead to more sustainable population trends. UN Member States set goals through the ICPD Programme of Action, which includes targets on poverty and inequality, women and girls, young people, reproductive health and rights, environmental sustainability, ageing, urbanization and migration.

“With the ICPD Programme of Action, governments set out an ambitious agenda to deliver inclusive, equitable and sustainable development,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. “Over the past two decades, this agenda has contributed to significant advances. Fewer people are living in extreme poverty. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are gaining ground worldwide. More people are living longer, healthier lives. More girls are in school. Fewer women are dying in pregnancy and childbirth. There are more laws to protect and uphold human rights.”

Since 1994, world population grew from 5.7 to 7.2 billion today. Despite slowing population growth, UN projections suggest the world's population could reach 9.6 billion by 2050, with most of the increase concentrated in the poorest countries. The current state of the world's population is one of unprecedented diversity and change, as reflected in new patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, migration and urbanization, according to a report of the Secretary-General on world demographic trends prepared for the Commission.

World population grows older as the number of younger people stabilises

Older persons are the world's fastest growing age group. The number of people over age 60 almost doubled between 1994 and 2014, and older persons today outnumber children under the age of five. Globally, the share of older persons is expected to reach 21 per cent by 2050.

The older population is itself ageing. The share of persons above age 80 keeps increasing, and there could be 392 million persons in this age group by 2050—more than three times today's number.

The number of young people has grown rapidly in recent decades but is expected to remain relatively stable over the next 35 years. In 2014, there were 1.2 billion persons aged 15 to 25. Today's young people are

healthier compared to their counterparts in 1994. They are also more likely to attend school, to postpone entry into the labour force and to delay marriage and childbearing.

Changing patterns of birth and death

By 1994, total fertility for the world had fallen to around three children per woman, compared to around 4.5 children per woman in the early 1970s. In 2014, total fertility for the world was around 2.5 children per woman.

The availability of safe and effective contraceptives and accessibility to family planning programmes and reproductive health care have been instrumental in reducing fertility levels. However, few countries are expected to achieve a 50 per cent reduction in the unmet need for family planning by 2014, as called for in 1994.

Declining fertility rates have also been driven by expanded opportunities for women and significant declines in infant and child mortality. Worldwide, the risk of death for children under age 5 fell by 40 per cent between 1994 and 2014.

In the 20 years since the Cairo conference, life expectancy has increased worldwide. Life expectancy at birth rose for the world as a whole from around 65 years in 1990-1995 to around 70 years in 2010-2015. Despite these significant gains, many countries will fail to meet the targets for life expectancy included in the ICPD Programme of Action.

The world becomes more urban and more mobile

More than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas. The urban population of the world increased from 2.3 billion in 1994 to 3.9 billion in 2014 and is projected to grow further to 6.3 billion by 2050. Cities present opportunities for increased access to economic activity and various services, but their rapid growth poses challenges to sustainable urban planning.

By comparison, the rural population of the world changed little between 1994 and 2014 and is projected to contract in future decades. As a result, there could be 300 million fewer rural inhabitants in 2050 than there are today.

International migration has increased in size, scope, complexity and impact over the last 20 years. In 2013, the number of international migrants worldwide reached 232 million, up from 154 million in 1990.

Commission to assess challenges and progress since 1994

According to Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the Commission's assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the Cairo conference "is happening at a critical moment, as Member States are elaborating new sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda." Moreover, he said "The challenges of sustainable development are inseparably linked to population patterns and trends. Therefore, the work of this session has direct relevance for preparations for the post-2015 development agenda."

During the upcoming session of the Commission on Population and Development, representatives and experts from UN Member States, various UN entities and civil society will gather to consider the theme, "Assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development." The discussion at the Commission will help guide the elaboration of the [post-2015 development agenda](#) and will inform the special session of the UN General Assembly commemorating the Cairo conference in September 2014.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/commission/sessions/2014/index.shtml>

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