

Global launch of World Population Prospects 2022, release of the latest China Population Prospects and symposium on low fertility

Key findings of World Population Prospects 2022

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China Population and Development Research Center, Beijing

H.E. Vice Minister Dr. YU Xuejun,
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Mr. LIU Zhenmin,
Dr. HE Dan, Director-General of the China Population and Development Research Center,
Mr. Arthur Erken, Director of the Policy and Strategy Division of UNFPA,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you all good morning from the United Nations in New York.

Please let me express my appreciation to Madame He Dan for convening today's conference and to our colleagues at UNFPA in Beijing for joining us in co-organizing this event.

Earlier today, we launched the report *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*. The report provides an overview of global population trends focusing on the period from 1950 to 2050, underpinned by analyses of historical demographic trends. It also presents population projections to the year 2100, which reflect a range of plausible outcomes at the global, regional and national levels.

The report is accompanied by the *World Population Prospects 2022* dataset. This is the twenty-seventh collection of global population data published by the United Nations since 1951. WPP is one of the most downloaded products of UN DESA.

The WPP data set presents population estimates from 1950 to the present for 237 countries or areas, comprising the total population of the world. The estimates are underpinned by a detailed evaluation of all available data sources, including over 1,750 national population censuses and nearly 2,900 sample surveys.

In order to better respond to the needs of Member States, the United Nations system and other users, and to ensure greater compliance with existing international standards for the production of population estimates and projections, *World Population Prospects 2022* was produced following a major upgrade of the entire production process.

A key feature of the upgraded dataset is that it includes, for the first time, estimates and projections by single year of age and by one-year time interval—the so-called “1x1” data configuration, instead of the “5x5” layout employed previously.

[slide 2] In preparing the new data, standardized and harmonized procedures were developed for various purposes: for example, to streamline the analysis and modelling of historical time series of fertility and mortality data, to evaluate and adjust population censuses, to estimate the level of net migration between two censuses, and to estimate population size and other demographic indicators using the cohort-component method. These new methods were developed and applied to data organized by single years of age and time.

The new data set is accompanied by various reports and other materials describing global and regional trends in population, including the three components of population change – fertility, mortality and international migration.

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[slide 3] The results of *World Population Prospects 2022* confirm that the world’s population has grown considerably during the lifetime of the United Nations. From an estimated 2.5 billion people in 1950, the population has increased more than threefold. Around mid-November 2022, we project that it will reach and surpass 8 billion.

Although the human population continues to grow, the pace of growth is slowing down. In 2020, the global growth rate fell under 1 per cent per year for the first time since 1950.

[slide 4] The slower pace of growth is attributable to the ongoing decline of fertility levels throughout the world. Today, two-thirds of the global population lives in a country or area where lifetime fertility is below 2.1 births per woman, roughly the level required for zero growth in the long run for a population with low mortality.

[slide 5] Using demographic and statistical methods, we have projected the global population forward to 2100. Our latest projections indicate that growth will continue, and that the global population could number around 9.7 billion in 2050 and 10.4 billion by 2100. We can have a relatively high degree of certainty about the projections for 2050, because more than half of the people who will be alive in 2050 have already been born. For 2100, however, the range of plausible outcomes is much wider.

[slide 6] Rates of population growth vary significantly across countries and regions. More than half of the projected increase in the global population up to 2050 will be concentrated in eight countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania.

[slide 7] The region of sub-Saharan Africa is expected to continue growing through 2100 and to contribute more than half of the global population increase anticipated through 2050. Whereas the populations of Australia and New Zealand, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) are expected to experience slower, but still positive, growth through the end of the century, the populations of Eastern and South--Eastern Asia,

Central and Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Northern America are projected to reach their peak size and to begin to decline before 2100.

[slide 8] Although slower population growth worldwide is attributable almost entirely to fertility decline, the impact of a reduction in fertility on the population growth rate is not immediate due to the momentum of past growth. In fact, two-thirds of the projected increase in global population through 2050 will be driven by such momentum, which is embedded in the youthful age structure of the current population. Such growth would occur even if childbearing in today's high-fertility countries were to fall immediately to around two births per woman. However, the momentum of past growth dissipates over time. If the lower fertility rate continues in future generations, the cumulative impact would bring a more substantial reduction of global population growth in the second half of the century.

[slide 9] Just as significant as the increase in numbers is the fact that the global population is growing older. Across the globe, the distribution of the population by age is shifting upward, from younger to older ages. For example, the share of the global population at ages 65 years and above is projected to rise from 10 per cent in 2022 to 16.5 per cent in 2050 and then 24 per cent in 2100, while the share below age 15 is projected to fall from 25 per cent in 2022 to 21 per cent in 2050 and then 16.5 per cent in 2100.

Understanding and anticipating these changes – both the growth and the ageing of the human population – are extremely important as the world seeks to set a path toward sustainable development. In most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, the share of population at the working ages has been increasing in recent years thanks to sustained reductions in the level of fertility, which lowers the proportion of children in the population and pushes up the share in the working-age range.

This upward shift of population from childhood to the working ages provides a time-bound opportunity for accelerated economic growth on a per capita basis – a phenomenon known as the “demographic dividend”. To maximize the potential benefits of a favourable age distribution, countries should invest in the further development of their human capital by ensuring access to health care for all and to a quality education at all ages and by promoting opportunities for productive employment and decent work.

On the other hand, countries with ageing populations should take steps to adapt public programmes to the growing proportion of older persons, including by establishing universal health care and long-term care systems and by improving the sustainability of social security and pension systems.

[slide 10] International migration is having an important impact on population trends for some countries. For high-income countries in the period from 2000 to 2020, the contribution of international migration to population growth exceeded the balance of births over deaths (80.5 million for the net inflow of migrants versus 66.2 million for the balance of births over deaths). Over the next few decades, the number of deaths will come to exceed the number of births in high-income countries, and thus immigration will become the sole driver of population growth in high-income countries.

By contrast, for the foreseeable future, population increase in low-income and lower-middle-income countries will continue to be driven by a substantial excess of births over deaths, which is considerably larger than the modest outflow of emigrants in most cases. All countries, whether experiencing net inflows or outflows of migrants, should take steps to ensure that such movements are safe, orderly and regular.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all components of population change, including fertility, mortality and migration. Global life expectancy at birth fell by 1.8 years, from 72.8 in 2019 to 71.0 years in 2021, due mostly to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, although with much variability across regions and countries.

In high-income countries, successive waves of the pandemic seem to have generated short-term fluctuations in numbers of pregnancies and births. In low- and middle-income countries, however, reported numbers of unintended pregnancies and births remained relatively stable over the course of the pandemic. The pandemic severely restricted all forms of human mobility, including international migration; nevertheless, the exact magnitude of the pandemic's impact on migration trends is difficult to ascertain due to data limitations.

Using information from the 2020 Chinese census, the estimated population of China in 2021 numbered 1.43 billion people. This is 18.3 million (1.3 per cent) less than the previous value (a projection) from the 2019 revision of the WPP. Estimated levels of total fertility were revised downward based on the 2020 census and on registry data available up to 2020.

India is projected to surpass China as the world's most populous country next year, in 2023.

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It is often said that people are at the centre of sustainable development. The population data published today by the United Nations provide essential information about the people who inhabit this planet: how many we are, how long we live, how many children we have and so forth.

These data show the progress we have made in some aspects of sustainable development, while also highlighting the need for further improvements.

These data remind us of the demographic "mega-trends" that shape today's world and affect our ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs.

These data can be used by Governments, international organizations and other actors to anticipate future demographic trends and to incorporate that information into development policies and programmes.

These data are being used by the United Nations system for the global monitoring of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In fact, the global monitoring of progress towards achieving the SDGs relies on WPP data for around one quarter of the 231 indicators approved for use in this context.

Over the years, the *World Population Prospects* has been one of the most downloaded products of UN DESA. We are proud to provide this essential information about the world's population.

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In closing, I wish to recognize that this new data set is the result of almost three years of work by my colleagues in the Population Division. I would like to acknowledge the dedicated and hardworking staff members who have contributed to the data set and report that are being released today.

I wish you a productive and insightful discussion at today's symposium.

Thank you.