

People and possibilities in a world of 7 billion

The State of World Population 2011 and all related press materials and website content are embargoed for release until 12:00 GMT on Wednesday, 26 October 2011.

The milestone of 7 billion—projected to be reached on 31 October 2011—will be marked by achievements, setbacks and paradoxes.

While women are on average having fewer children than they were in the 1960s, our numbers continue to rise. Globally, people are younger—and older—than ever before. In some of the poorest countries, high fertility rates hamper development and perpetuate poverty, while in some of the richest countries, low fertility rates and too few people entering the job market are raising concerns about prospects for sustained economic growth and the viability of social security systems.

While labour shortages threaten to stymie the economies of some industrialized countries, unemployed would-be migrants in developing countries are finding more and more national borders closed to them and the expertise they may have to offer. And while progress is being made in reducing extreme poverty, gaps between rich and poor are widening almost everywhere.

The State of World Population 2011 explores some of these paradoxes from the perspective of individuals and describes the obstacles they confront—and overcome—in trying to build better lives for themselves, their families, communities and nations.

Through personal stories, this report sheds light on the real-life challenges we face in our world of 7 billion. It is mainly a report from the field, from nine countries where the ordinary people who live there, the national experts who study demographic trends and the policy-makers who must make decisions based on local conditions talk directly about their lives and work: China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, India, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Together, the people profiled from these countries form a collage of the diverse human experiences, aspirations and priorities in our world of 7 billion.

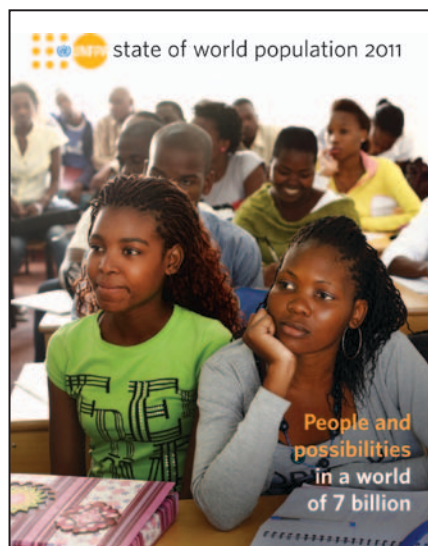
Each of the countries featured in the report is seeing in their specific population trends—such as urbanization, longer life expectancies and rapidly expanding working-age populations—not only big challenges but also enormous opportunities to seize these moments and turn them into good news.

In conversations with people living and working in these countries, it does not take long to discover that no population issue is now seen as unconnected to others.

The lives of ageing citizens, for example, are universally bound up with trends among youth. In many developed and developing countries, younger job-seekers are migrating from rural areas to cities or to other countries where employment prospects are better, often leaving older family members behind, sometimes without the support they need to carry out their daily lives. In some of the richer countries, smaller numbers of young people mean uncertainty about who will care for the old in future years and pay for the benefits seniors enjoy.

There is much to celebrate in world population trends over the last 60 years, especially the average life expectancy, which leapt from about 48 years in the early 1950s to about 68 in the first decade of the new century. Infant deaths plunged from about 133 in 1,000 births in the 1950s to 46 per 1,000 in the period from 2005 to 2010. Immunization campaigns reduced the prevalence of childhood diseases worldwide.

In addition, fertility, the number of children a woman is expected to have in her childbearing years, dropped by more than half, from about 6.0 to 2.5, partly because of



countries' economic growth and development but also because of a complex mix of social and cultural forces and greater access by women to education, income-earning opportunities and sexual and reproductive health care, including modern methods of family planning.

Our record population size can be viewed in many ways as a success for humanity. But not everyone has benefited from this achievement or the higher quality of life that this implies. Great disparities exist between and within countries. Disparities in rights and opportunities also exist between men and women, girls and boys. Charting a path now to development that promotes equality, rather than exacerbates or reinforces inequalities, is more important than ever.

The Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in its *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision* (published in May 2011), foresees a global population of 9.3 billion people in 2050, and more than 10 billion by the end of this century. Much of this increase is expected to come from high-fertility countries, which comprise 39 in Africa, nine in Asia, six in Oceania and four in Latin America.

Asia will remain the most populous major area in the world in the 21st century, but Africa will gain ground as its population more than triples, increasing from 1 billion in 2011 to 3.6 billion in 2100. In 2011, 60 per cent of the world population lives in Asia and 15 per cent in Africa. But Africa's population is growing about 2.3 per cent a year, a rate more than double that of Asia (1 per cent). Asia's population, which is currently 4.2 billion, is expected to peak around the middle of the century (5.2 billion in 2052) and to start a slow decline thereafter.

The populations of all other major areas combined (the Americas, Europe and Oceania) amount to 1.7 billion in 2011 and are projected to rise to nearly 2 billion by 2060 and then decline very slowly, remaining still near 2 billion by the turn of the century. Among the regions, the population of Europe is projected to peak around 2025 at 0.74 billion and decline thereafter.

Years when world population reached increments of 1 billion

1 billion	1804
2 billion	1927
3 billion	1959
4 billion	1974
5 billion	1987
6 billion	1999*
7 billion	2011

This report makes the case that with planning and the right investments in people now—to empower them to make choices that are not only good for themselves but for our global commons—our world of 7 billion and beyond can have thriving, sustainable cities, productive labour forces that can fuel economic growth, youth populations that contribute to the well-being of economies and societies, and a generation of older people who are healthy and actively engaged in the social and economic affairs of their communities.

In many parts of the developing world, where population growth is outpacing economic growth, the unmet need for reproductive health care, especially voluntary family planning, remains great. The attainment of a stable population is a *sine qua non* for accelerated economic growth and development. Governments that are serious about eradicating poverty should also be serious about providing the services, supplies, information that women, men and young people need to exercise their reproductive rights.

We all have a stake in the future of humanity. Every individual, every government, every business is more interconnected and interdependent than ever, so what each of us does now will matter to all of us long into the future. Together we can change and improve the world.

*Year when the milestone of 6 billion was observed by the United Nations.

For more information contact

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund
 Information and External Relations Division
 Media and Communications Branch
 605 Third Avenue
 6th Floor
 New York, NY 10158
 Tel. +1-212 297-4992
 E-mail: kollodge@unfpa.org

The full report in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish, along with feature stories, video, photographs and other resources for journalists are online at www.unfpa.org.