

B. POPULATION AGE COMPOSITION

The primary demographic consequence of fertility decline, especially if combined with increases in life expectancy, is population ageing, a process whereby the proportion of older persons in the population increases and that of younger persons declines. In 1950, just 8 per cent of the world population was aged 60 years or over. By 2010 that proportion had risen to 11 per cent and it is expected to reach 22 per cent in 2050 (table I.6). Globally, the number of older persons (aged 60 years or over) will increase by a factor of 2.6, passing from 759 million in 2010 to 2 billion in 2050. In contrast, the number of children (persons under age 15) is projected to decline over the next 40 years, passing from 1.86 billion in 2010 to 1.80 billion in 2050 and their share of the total population will drop from 27 per cent in 2010 to 20 per cent in 2050.

Increases in the median age, the age at which half the population is older and half is younger than that age, are indicative of population ageing. In 2009, 18 countries, all of them except for China, Hong Kong SAR and Singapore located in the more developed regions, had a median age higher than 40 years.

Leading this group was Japan with a median age of 44.4 years, followed closely by Germany with median age of 43.9 years and Italy with median age of 43 years (table A.11). In contrast, the median ages in Niger and Uganda in 2009 were below 16 years, making their populations the youngest on the planet.

By 2050, 88 countries are expected to have a median age above 40, 43 of which are located in the developing world. That is, population ageing, which is already pervasive in developed countries, is expected to be common in the developing world of the future and is projected to occur more rapidly in developing countries than it did in their developed counterparts.

Despite the general trend toward population ageing, countries that still have relatively high fertility will have a younger population than the rest in 2050. Mostly least developed countries are in this group. In 2050, nine least developed countries will have the youngest populations on earth, with median ages at or below 25 years. They are: Niger, Afghanistan, Somalia, Uganda, Chad, Zambia, United Republic of Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Timor-Leste (table A.11).

The more developed regions have been leading the process of population ageing and their experience provides a point of comparison for the expected ageing of the population of less developed regions. In 1950, the number of children (persons under age 15) in the more developed world was more than twice the number of older persons (those aged 60 years or over), with children accounting for 27 per cent of the total population and the elderly for only 12 per cent. By 2010, the proportion of older persons in the more developed regions had surpassed that of children (22 per cent versus 17 per cent) and in 2050, the proportion of older persons is expected to be more than double that of children (33 per cent versus 15 per cent). In 2050, the number of older persons in more developed regions is projected to be more than four times their number in 1950 (95 million versus 416 million) while the number of children is projected to decline from 222 million in 1950 to 197 million in 2050.

Until 2010, population ageing had been considerably slower in the less developed regions where fertility is still relatively high. The proportion of children had declined from 37 per cent in 1950 to 29 per cent in 2010, while the proportion of older persons had increased from 6 per cent to 9 per cent. However, a period of more rapid population ageing lies ahead for the less developed regions. By 2050, the proportion of older persons in those regions is expected to rise to 20 per cent, whereas the proportion of children is expected to decline to the same percentage.

Trends in the number of persons of working age (those aged 15 to 59 years) are particularly important for all countries. The proportion of the population in those ages is an important factor related to the potential for economic growth. In the more developed regions, the proportion of the population of working age decreased from 61 per cent in 1950 to 59 per cent in 1970 and then increased steadily to reach 62 per cent in 2010. However, this increase is over and the proportion of the population of working age in the more developed regions is expected to decline steadily in the future, reaching 52 per cent by 2050.

In the less developed regions, the proportion of the population of working age is expected to decline slightly, passing from 62 per cent in 2010 to 59 per cent in 2050. However, among the least developed countries, that proportion will rise from 55 per cent in 2010 to 62 per cent in 2050, an increase that represents both an opportunity and a challenge: the opportunity for economic growth provided that the challenge of creating gainful employment for the growing numbers of persons of working age is met.

Among the older population, the number and proportion of the oldest-old, that is, persons aged 80 years or over, is rising. In 2010, there were 106 million oldest-old corresponding to 1.5 per cent of the world population. By 2050, this segment of the population is projected to reach 395 million or 4.3 per cent of the world population. The oldest-old is the fastest growing segment of the world population.

Particularly rapid increases in this segment of the population are expected in the less developed regions where the oldest-old are projected to increase from 52 million in 2010 to 274 million in 2050 implying an average annual rate of 4.14 per cent (table I.5). By 2050, 69 per cent of all persons aged 80 or over are expected to live in developing countries.

In 2010, 68 countries had populations where the oldest-old accounted for more than 1.5 per cent of the population, the percentage of the oldest-old at the world level. In Japan the oldest-old accounted for over 6 per cent of the population and in another seven countries, Italy, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Spain, the percentage of the oldest-old exceeded 5 per cent. By 2050, 90 countries are expected to have populations where those aged 80 years or over account for more than 4.3 per cent of the population, the projected share of the oldest-old at the world level. In 24 of those countries, led by Japan and Singapore, the oldest-old are expected to account for over 10 per cent of the population.

Just as the overall population, the oldest-old tend to be concentrated in the most populous countries. In 2010, 19.3 million lived in China, 12.1 million in the United States and 8.1 million in India. In 2050, those countries will still have the largest numbers of persons aged 80 or over: 101 million in China, 43 million in India and 32 million in the United States.

TABLE I.3. AVERAGE ANNUAL RATES OF CHANGE OF THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD AND MAJOR AREAS, 1950-1975, 1975-2009 AND 2009-2050 FOR DIFFERENT VARIANTS (percentage)

Major area	1950-1975	1975-2009	2009-2050			
			Low	Medium	High	Constant
World.....	1.89	1.53	0.37	0.71	1.04	1.17
More developed regions	1.02	0.48	-0.22	0.08	0.38	0.05
Less developed regions.....	2.25	1.82	0.49	0.83	1.16	1.36
Least developed countries	2.31	2.50	1.37	1.69	2.00	2.65
Other less developed countries.....	2.24	1.72	0.29	0.65	0.98	1.04
Africa.....	2.44	2.59	1.34	1.66	1.97	2.65
Asia.....	2.11	1.62	0.23	0.58	0.92	0.92
Europe	0.84	0.23	-0.45	-0.14	0.16	-0.27
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.64	1.73	0.18	0.55	0.91	0.89
Northern America.....	1.38	1.07	0.32	0.62	0.91	0.72
Oceania.....	2.03	1.49	0.60	0.91	1.20	1.19

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2009). *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

TABLE I.4. MEDIAN AGE IN YEARS FOR THE WORLD AND MAJOR AREAS, 1950, 1980, 2009 AND 2050
ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT VARIANTS

<i>Major area</i>	<i>Median age (years)</i>			<i>Median age in 2050</i>			
	<i>1950</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Constant</i>
World.....	24.0	23.0	28.9	42.9	38.4	33.9	32.2
More developed regions.....	29.0	32.0	39.4	50.4	45.6	40.5	46.1
Less developed regions.....	21.6	20.1	26.5	41.7	37.2	32.8	30.4
Least developed countries.....	19.5	17.5	19.7	32.3	29.0	26.2	20.4
Other less developed countries.....	21.9	20.4	27.7	44.2	39.4	34.6	33.7
Africa.....	19.2	17.5	19.6	31.7	28.5	25.8	19.9
Asia.....	22.3	21.1	28.7	45.2	40.2	35.3	35.2
Europe.....	29.7	32.7	39.9	51.7	46.6	41.2	48.7
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	20.0	20.0	27.4	46.8	41.7	36.2	36.4
Northern America.....	29.8	30.0	36.8	46.6	42.1	37.4	40.4
Oceania.....	28.0	26.6	32.9	43.5	39.1	34.8	35.1

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2009). *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

TABLE I.5. AVERAGE ANNUAL RATES OF CHANGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION AND THE POPULATION
IN BROAD AGE GROUPS, BY MAJOR AREA, 2009-2050
(MEDIUM VARIANT)

<i>Major area</i>	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-59</i>	<i>60+</i>	<i>80+</i>	<i>Total population</i>
World.....	-0.08	0.57	2.44	3.30	0.71
More developed regions.....	-0.09	-0.35	1.11	2.07	0.08
Less developed regions.....	-0.08	0.73	2.96	4.14	0.83
Least developed countries.....	0.73	1.99	3.57	4.18	1.69
Other less developed countries.....	-0.33	0.47	2.89	4.14	0.65
Africa.....	0.71	1.99	3.35	4.00	1.66
Asia.....	-0.38	0.37	2.75	3.94	0.58
Europe.....	-0.21	-0.66	0.98	1.93	-0.14
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	-0.67	0.36	2.88	3.83	0.55
Northern America.....	0.21	0.34	1.67	2.44	0.62
Oceania.....	0.31	0.76	2.03	2.96	0.91

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2009). *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

TABLE I.6. DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD AND MAJOR AREAS BY BROAD AGE GROUPS, 2010 AND 2050
 (MEDIUM VARIANT)

Major area	Population in 2010 (millions)						Population in 2050 (millions)					
	0-14	15-24	25-59	60+	80+	Total	0-14	15-24	25-59	60+	80+	Total
World.....	1 862	1 218	3 070	759	106	6 909	1 797	1 209	4 136	2 008	395	9 150
More developed regions.....	204	159	605	269	53	1 237	197	134	528	416	121	1 275
Less developed regions.....	1 657	1 059	2 465	490	52	5 671	1 601	1 074	3 607	1 592	274	7 875
Least developed countries.....	341	173	297	44	3	855	452	288	747	185	18	1 672
Other less developed countries.....	1 316	887	2 168	446	49	4 817	1 149	786	2 860	1 407	256	6 202
Africa.....	416	209	353	55	4	1 033	546	348	892	213	21	1 998
Asia.....	1 092	756	1 906	414	47	4 167	937	645	2 413	1 236	228	5 231
Europe.....	113	93	366	161	31	733	104	70	281	236	66	691
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	163	105	261	59	9	589	124	87	331	186	40	729
Northern America.....	70	49	168	65	13	352	76	52	196	125	36	448
Oceania.....	9	5	16	6	1	36	10	7	23	12	3	51
	<i>Percentage distribution by age group</i>											
World.....	27	18	44	11	2	100	20	13	45	22	4	100
More developed regions.....	17	13	49	22	4	100	15	11	41	33	9	100
Less developed regions.....	29	19	43	9	1	100	20	14	46	20	3	100
Least developed countries.....	40	20	35	5	0	100	27	17	45	11	1	100
Other less developed countries.....	27	18	45	9	1	100	19	13	46	23	4	100
Africa.....	40	20	34	5	0	100	27	17	45	11	1	100
Asia.....	26	18	46	10	1	100	18	12	46	24	4	100
Europe.....	15	13	50	22	4	100	15	10	41	34	10	100
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	28	18	44	10	1	100	17	12	45	26	5	100
Northern America.....	20	14	48	18	4	100	17	12	44	28	8	100
Oceania.....	24	15	45	15	3	100	19	13	44	24	7	100

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2009). *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

NOTE: Refers only to countries or areas with 100,000 persons or more in 2009.