

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Population Division

World Population Prospects

The 2006 Revision

Highlights



United Nations
New York, 2007

II. FERTILITY

According to the *2006 Revision*, total fertility—that is, the average number of children a woman would bear if fertility rates remained unchanged during her lifetime—is 2.55 children per woman in 2005-2010 at the world level (table II.1). This average masks the heterogeneity of fertility levels among countries. In 2005-2010, 73 countries or areas (45 of them located in the more developed regions) have fertility levels below 2.1 children per woman, that is, below replacement level⁶, whereas 122 countries or areas (all of which are located in the less developed regions) have total fertility levels at or above 2.1 children per woman. Among these 122 countries, 27 have total fertility levels at or above 5 children per woman, 25 of which are least developed countries (table II.2 and map 5).

TABLE II.1. ESTIMATED AND PROJECTED TOTAL FERTILITY FOR THE WORLD, THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENT GROUPS AND THE MAJOR AREAS, 1970-1975, 2005-2010 AND 2045-2050 ACCORDING TO VARIANT

Major area	Total fertility (children per woman)					
	1970-1975	2005-2010	2045-2050			
			Low	Medium	High	Constant
World.....	4.47	2.55	1.54	2.02	2.51	3.49
More developed regions.....	2.13	1.60	1.29	1.79	2.28	1.68
Less developed regions.....	5.41	2.75	1.57	2.05	2.54	3.69
Least developed countries.....	6.61	4.63	2.02	2.50	2.99	5.49
Other less developed countries.....	5.25	2.45	1.42	1.91	2.41	3.07
Africa.....	6.72	4.67	1.97	2.46	2.95	5.47
Asia.....	5.04	2.34	1.40	1.90	2.39	2.94
Europe.....	2.16	1.45	1.26	1.76	2.26	1.47
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	5.04	2.37	1.36	1.86	2.36	2.67
Northern America.....	2.01	2.00	1.35	1.85	2.35	1.99
Oceania.....	3.23	2.30	1.43	1.93	2.43	2.83

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights. New York: United Nations.

The 73 countries where total fertility is below replacement level in 2005-2010 account for 43 per cent of the world population or approximately 2.9 billion people. Countries with fertility at or above replacement level account for 3.8 billion people or 57 per cent of the world population. Because of their low fertility and the expectation that it will not rise markedly in the future, the countries with below-replacement fertility in 2005-2010 are projected to have only a slightly larger population in 2050 than today. In contrast, the countries whose fertility is currently at or above replacement level are expected to experience a marked population increase, reaching 6.1 billion by 2050 and accounting then for 67 per cent of the world population.

⁶ Replacement-level fertility is the level that needs to be sustained over the long run to ensure that a population replaces itself. For most countries having low or moderate mortality levels, replacement level is close to 2.1 children per woman.

Since, 1974, when the first World Population Conference was held in Bucharest, Romania, fertility has declined by more than 20 per cent in 135 developing countries and by over 50 per cent in 66 of them. The fastest fertility reductions occurred in countries in Asia, including Bhutan, Hong Kong SAR China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, Macao SAR China, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam. Fertility also declined rapidly in Algeria and Tunisia in Northern Africa and in Mexico in Latin America. The average number of children in those countries is currently below 2.38 children per woman.

Although most developing countries are already far advanced in the transition from high to low fertility, 14 countries still have fertility levels of 6 children per woman or higher in 2005-2010 and in three of them total fertility is equal or greater than 7 children per woman (table II.2 and table A.13). Although the fertility of those 14 countries is projected to decline after 2010 at a pace of about one child per decade, none is expected to reach 2.1 children per woman by 2045-2050 in the medium variant. As a result, their population is expected nearly to triple, passing from 227 million in 2008 to 642 million in 2050.

These 14 countries are least developed countries—Afghanistan, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Timor Leste and Uganda—and several are highly affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Moreover, a number of them have been experiencing civil strife and political instability in recent years, factors that militate against the provision of basic services for the population. The continuation of rapid population growth poses serious challenges to their future development.

Despite the important contribution to population growth of high-fertility countries (those with a total fertility above 6 children per woman), they account today for less than 4 per cent of the world population and are expected to constitute 7 per cent of the world population by 2050, according to the medium variant. Countries with total fertility ranging from 4 to 6 children per woman account today for 9 per cent of the world population (table II.2).

In 2007, the majority of people in the developing world live in the 81 countries with total fertility ranging from 2.1 to 4 children per woman, which account for 44 per cent of the world population. Most of those countries are projected to have a total fertility below replacement level by 2045-2050, according to the medium variant. Overall, 148 countries or areas are projected to have below-replacement fertility in 2045-2050, with 119 having a total fertility equal to or lower than 1.85 children per woman. As a result, according to the medium variant, nearly 80 per cent of the world population is expected to live in countries with below-replacement fertility in 2045-2050.

Fertility levels in developed countries, many of which experienced a “baby-boom” during the 1950s and 1960s, have generally declined since the early 1970s to below-replacement level. In fact, in 1970-1975, 19 countries out of the 45 developed countries in the world already had below-replacement fertility. By 2005-2010, all developed countries had reached fertility levels below 2.1 children per woman. Among them, 12 had reached historically unprecedented low fertility levels (below 1.3 children per woman), with Belarus, Poland and the Ukraine exhibiting the lowest levels in the developed world.

At the world level, the medium variant projects total fertility to be 2.02 children per woman in 2045-2050 (table II.1), the result of 1.79 children per woman in the more developed regions and 2.05 children per woman in the less developed regions. That is, although the difference in total fertility between the more and the less developed regions narrows considerably by mid-century, the less developed regions are still expected to have a higher total fertility than the more developed regions. That difference persists in all projection variants. Total fertility in the low variant is expected to be 1.29 children per woman in the more developed regions and 1.57

children per woman in the less developed regions. In the high variant, total fertility is projected to be 2.28 children per woman in the more developed regions and 2.54 children per woman in the less developed regions.

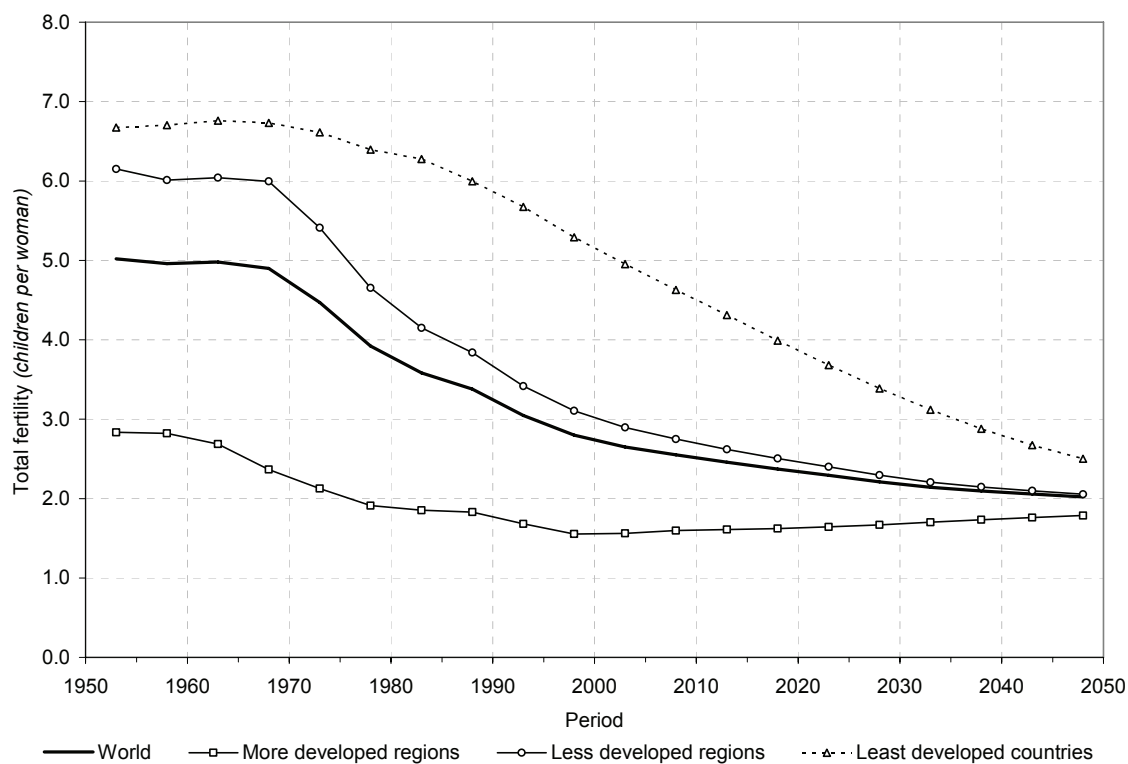
TABLE II.2. DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTRIES AND AREAS BY LEVEL OF TOTAL FERTILITY IN 1950-1955, 1970-1975, 2005-2010 AND 2045-2050 (MEDIUM VARIANT)

<i>Range of total fertility</i>	<i>Population (millions)</i>				<i>Number of countries</i>				
	<i>1953</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2048</i>	<i>1950-1955</i>	<i>1970-1975</i>	<i>2005-2010</i>	<i>2045-2050</i>	
Greater or equal to 7.....	141	156	45	0	32	33	3	0	
Between 6 and less than 7	1 068	603	182	0	72	50	11	0	
Between 5 and less than 6	560	921	388	0	31	27	13	0	
Between 4 and less than 5	35	1 113	213	0	14	20	14	0	
Between 3 and less than 4	275	88	451	185	16	14	29	6	
Between 2.1 and less than 3 ...	585	355	2 547	1 650	25	32	52	41	
Less than 2.1.....	10	687	2 922	7 294	5	19	73	148	
Total	2 675	3 924	6 748	9 128	195	195	195	195	
			<i>Percentage</i>						
Greater or equal to 7.....	5.3	4.0	0.7	0.0	16.4	16.9	1.5	0.0	
Between 6 and less than 7	39.9	15.4	2.7	0.0	36.9	25.6	5.6	0.0	
Between 5 and less than 6	20.9	23.5	5.8	0.0	15.9	13.8	6.7	0.0	
Between 4 and less than 5	1.3	28.4	3.2	0.0	7.2	10.3	7.2	0.0	
Between 3 and less than 4	10.3	2.2	6.7	2.0	8.2	7.2	14.9	3.1	
Between 2.1 and less than 3 ...	21.9	9.0	37.7	18.1	12.8	16.4	26.7	21.0	
Less than 2.1.....	0.4	17.5	43.3	79.9	2.6	9.7	37.4	75.9	

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights. New York: United Nations.

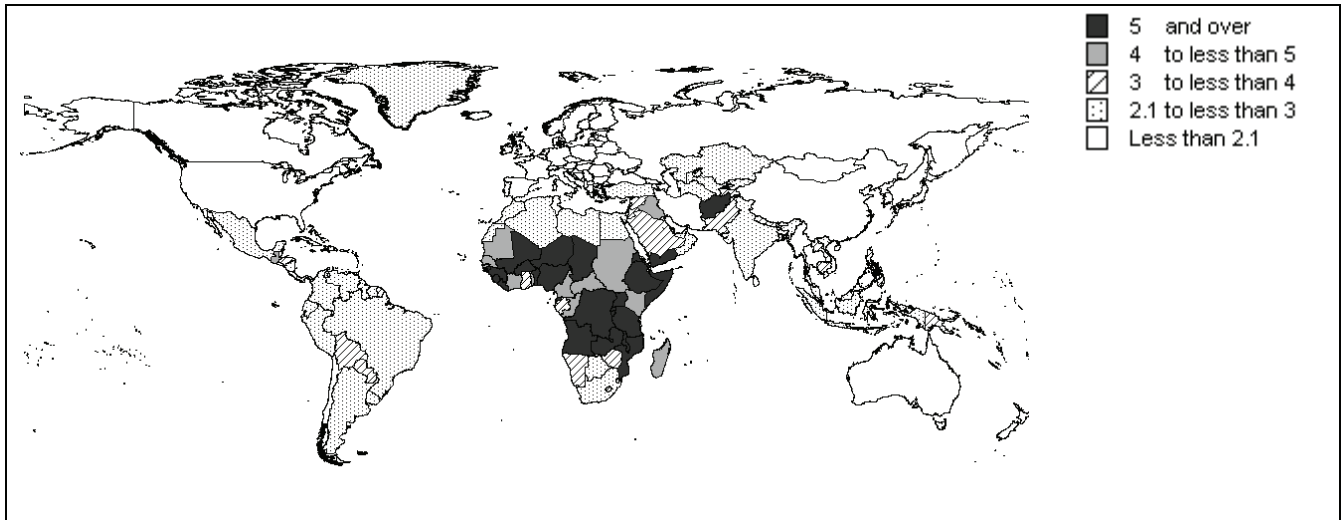
NOTE: Only countries or areas with 100,000 inhabitants or more in 2007 are included.

Figure 3. Total fertility trajectories for the world and the major development groups, 1950-2050 (medium variant)



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights. New York: United Nations.

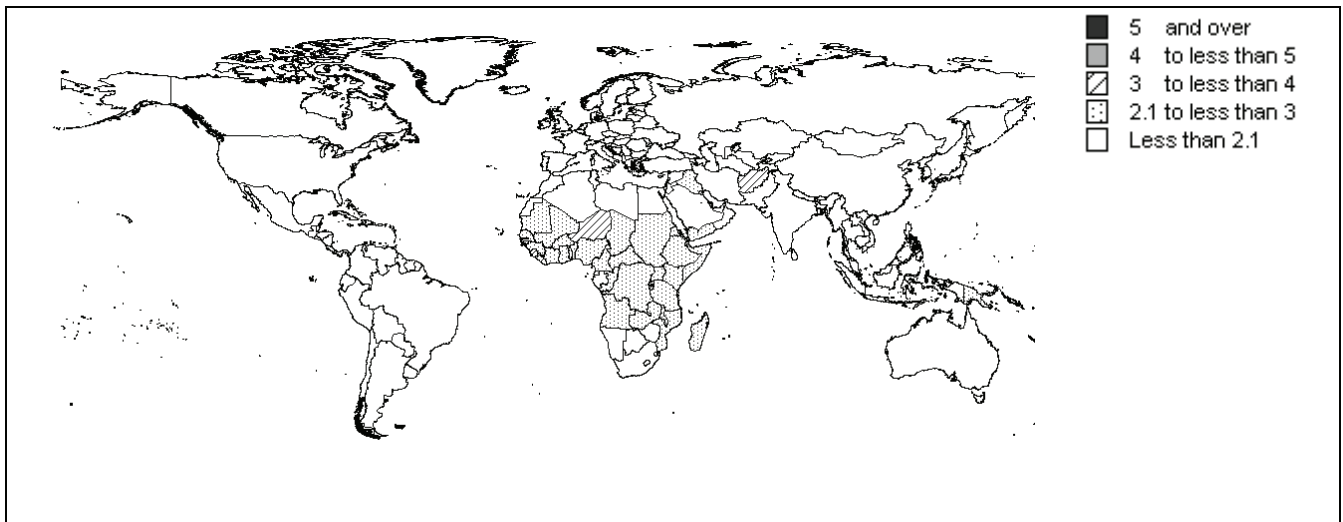
Map 5. Total fertility in 2005-2010, medium variant (*children per woman*)



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights*. New York: United Nations.

NOTE: The boundaries shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Map 6. Total fertility in 2045-2050, medium variant (*children per woman*)



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights*. New York: United Nations.

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