

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Population Division

World Population Prospects

The 2006 Revision

Highlights



United Nations
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I. WORLD POPULATION TRENDS

A. POPULATION SIZE AND GROWTH

On 1 July 2007, the world population will reach 6.7 billion with 5.4 billion (or 82 per cent of the world's total) living in the less developed regions (table I.1). Out of these, 804 million reside in the 50 least developed countries and account for 12 per cent of the world population. More developed countries, whose total population amounts to 1.2 billion inhabitants, account for 18 per cent of the world population (table I.2).

According to the medium variant, the world population is projected to reach 9.2 billion persons by 2050, that is, 2.5 billion more than in 2007, an increase equivalent to the combined populations of China and India today. Most of this growth will be absorbed by developing countries. Between 2007 and 2050, the population of the more developed regions will remain largely unchanged at 1.2 billion inhabitants, but the population of the less developed regions is projected to rise from 5.4 billion in 2007 to 7.9 billion in 2050. At the same time, the population of the least developed countries is projected more than to double, from 804 million inhabitants in 2007 to 1.7 billion in 2050. Consequently, by 2050, 86 per cent of the world population is expected to live in the less developed regions, including 19 per cent in the least developed countries, whereas only 14 per cent will live in the more developed regions.

TABLE I.1. POPULATION OF THE WORLD, MAJOR DEVELOPMENT GROUPS AND MAJOR AREAS, 1950, 1975, 2007 AND 2050 ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT VARIANTS

Major area	Population (millions)			Population in 2050 (millions)			
	1950	1975	2007	Low	Medium	High	Constant
World	2 535	4 076	6 671	7 792	9 191	10 756	11 858
More developed regions	814	1 048	1 223	1 065	1 245	1 451	1 218
Less developed regions.....	1 722	3 028	5 448	6 727	7 946	9 306	10 639
Least developed countries	200	358	804	1 496	1 742	2 002	2 794
Other less developed countries	1 521	2 670	4 644	5 231	6 204	7 304	7 845
Africa	224	416	965	1 718	1 998	2 302	3 251
Asia	1 411	2 394	4 030	4 444	5 266	6 189	6 525
Europe	548	676	731	566	664	777	626
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	168	325	572	641	769	914	939
Northern America.....	172	243	339	382	445	517	460
Oceania.....	13	21	34	42	49	56	57

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.

World population in 2050 would be substantially higher if the decline in fertility projected in the medium variant fails to be realized. If fertility were to remain constant at current levels in all countries, world population would almost double by 2050, reaching 11.9 billion. In the high variant, where fertility is assumed to remain mostly half a child higher than in the medium variant, the world population in 2050 would reach 10.8 billion persons. In the low variant, where fertility is projected to be half a child lower than in the medium variant, world population would still grow, but only to reach 7.8 billion by 2050. According to the low variant,

the population of the least developed countries would still nearly double, to reach 1.5 billion by 2050, but the population of the more developed regions would decline to less than 1.1 billion.

Most of the world population lives in a few countries. In 2007, 40 per cent of the world population lived in China and India. A further eight countries accounted for a further 20 per cent of the earth's inhabitants, namely, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Russian Federation and Japan, in order of population size (table A.3). However, most of the countries of the world have small populations. Thus, 77 per cent of the 229 countries or areas covered by the *2006 Revision* had populations of less than 20 million inhabitants in 2007 and, taken together, they account for 12 per cent of the world's population.

By 2025, the population of India is projected to surpass that of China and the two will account then for about 36 per cent of the world population. By 2050, three least developed countries—Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia—will be among the ten most populous countries in the world. Together with India, China, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria and Brazil, in order of population size, they are projected to be the ten most populous countries in the world in 2050.

Increments in the world population are also largely concentrated in a few countries, generally the most populous. Thus, during 2005-2050, eight countries—India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, the United States, Bangladesh and China, in order of population increment—are expected to account for almost half of the projected population increase at the world level.

Over most of human history, the world population grew very slowly if at all. Growth rates began increasing slowly during the 17th or 18th centuries as mortality started to decline. With accelerating gains in longevity, the growth rate of the world population increased, especially during the 20th century, when it reached a peak at 2 per cent per year in 1965-1970 (figure 2). Since then, the speed of population growth has been decelerating, largely as a result of falling fertility in the developing world. By 2005-2010, the population growth rate at the world level had reached 1.17 per cent per year and is projected to decline to 0.36 per cent per year by 2045-2050.

However, because fertility decline has not occurred simultaneously in all countries, the pace of population growth still differs considerably among development groups. Thus, whereas today the population of the more developed regions is rising at an annual rate of 0.28 per cent, that of the less developed regions is increasing almost five times as fast, at 1.37 per cent annually, and the least developed countries as a group are experiencing even more rapid population growth, at 2.37 per cent per year. Such differences, albeit dampened, are expected to persist until 2050. By that time, according to the medium variant, the population of the more developed regions will have been declining for about 20 years, whereas the population of the less developed regions will still be rising at an annual rate of 0.44 per cent per year. More importantly, the population of the least developed countries will likely be increasing at a robust annual rate of 1.24 per cent in 2045-2050, a rate that, if maintained, would lead to a doubling of the population every 56 years (figure 2).

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 2005 that proportion had risen to 10 per cent and it is expected to reach 22 per cent in 2050 (table I.3). Globally, the number of older persons (aged 60 years or over) will nearly triple, passing from 673 million in 2005 to 2 billion in 2050. In contrast, the number of children (persons under age 15) is projected to decline over the

next 45 years, passing from 1.84 billion in 2005 to 1.82 billion in 2050 and their share of the total population will drop from 28 per cent in 2005 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 2005, 13 countries, all of them located in the more developed regions, had a median age higher than 40 years. Leading this group was Japan with a median age of 43 years, followed closely by Germany and Italy, with median ages of 42 years (table A.11). In contrast, the median ages in Mali, Niger and Uganda in 2005 were all at or below 16 years, making their populations the youngest on the planet.

By 2050, 93 countries are expected to have a median age above 40, 48 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 (map 3 and map 4).

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, eight least developed countries will have the youngest populations on earth, with median ages at or below 24 years. They are: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger and Uganda (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 2005, the proportion of older persons in the more developed regions had surpassed that of children (20 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 406 million) while the number of children is projected to decline from 223 million in 1950 to 190 million in 2050.

Until 2005, 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 31 per cent in 2005, while the proportion of older persons had increased from 6 per cent to 8 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 21 per cent.

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 63 per cent in 2005. 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 61 per cent in 2005 to 59 per cent in 2050. However, among the least developed countries, that proportion will rise from 53 per cent in 2005 to 61 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 2005, there were 88 million oldest-old corresponding to 1.3 per cent of the world population. By 2050, this segment of the population is projected to reach 402 million or 4.4 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 43 million in 2005 to 284 million in 2050 implying an average annual rate of 4.2 per cent (table I.4). By 2050, 71 per cent of all persons aged 80 or over are expected to live in developing countries.

In 2005, over 60 countries had populations where the oldest-old accounted for more than 1.3 per cent of the population, the percentage of the oldest-old at the world level. In Italy and Sweden the oldest-old accounted for over 5 per cent of the population. By 2050, 92 countries are expected to have populations where those aged 80 years or over account for more than 4.4 per cent of the population, the projected share of the oldest-old at the world level. In 23 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 2005, 15.4 million lived in China, 10.6 million in the United States and 7.8 million in India. In 2050, those countries will still have the largest numbers of persons aged 80 or over: 103 million in China, 51 million in India and 31 million in the United States.

TABLE I.2. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORLD POPULATION BY DEVELOPMENT GROUP AND MAJOR AREA, 1950, 1975, 2007 AND 2050, ACCORDING TO PROJECTION VARIANT

<i>Major area</i>	<i>Percentage distribution</i>			<i>Percentage distribution in 2050</i>			
	<i>1950</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Constant</i>
More developed regions	32.1	25.7	18.3	13.7	13.5	13.5	10.3
Less developed regions.....	67.9	74.3	81.7	86.3	86.5	86.5	89.7
Least developed countries.....	7.9	8.8	12.1	19.2	19.0	18.6	23.6
Other less developed countries	60.0	65.5	69.6	67.1	67.5	67.9	66.2
Africa.....	8.8	10.2	14.5	22.0	21.7	21.4	27.4
Asia.....	55.6	58.7	60.4	57.0	57.3	57.5	55.0
Europe	21.6	16.6	11.0	7.3	7.2	7.2	5.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	6.6	8.0	8.6	8.2	8.4	8.5	7.9
Northern America.....	6.8	6.0	5.1	4.9	4.8	4.8	3.9
Oceania.....	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5

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.

TABLE I.3. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION BY BROAD AGE GROUP FOR THE WORLD, THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENT GROUPS AND THE MAJOR AREAS, MEDIUM VARIANT, 2005 AND 2050

<i>Major area</i>	<i>Percentage distribution in 2005</i>				<i>Percentage distribution in 2050</i>			
	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-59</i>	<i>60+</i>	<i>80+</i>	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-59</i>	<i>60+</i>	<i>80+</i>
World.....	28.3	61.4	10.3	1.3	19.8	58.3	21.8	4.4
More developed region.....	17.0	62.9	20.1	3.7	15.2	52.2	32.6	9.4
Less developed regions.....	30.9	61.0	8.1	0.8	20.6	59.3	20.1	3.6
Least developed countries.....	41.5	53.4	5.1	0.4	28.2	61.5	10.3	1.1
Other less developed countries	29.1	62.3	8.6	0.9	18.4	58.7	22.9	4.3
Africa.....	41.4	53.4	5.2	0.4	28.0	61.7	10.4	1.1
Asia	28.0	62.7	9.2	1.0	18.0	58.3	23.7	4.5
Europe	15.9	63.5	20.6	3.5	14.6	50.9	34.5	9.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	29.8	61.2	9.0	1.2	18.0	57.8	24.3	5.2
Northern America.....	20.5	62.7	16.7	3.5	17.1	55.6	27.3	7.8
Oceania.....	24.9	61.0	14.1	2.6	18.4	56.9	24.8	6.8

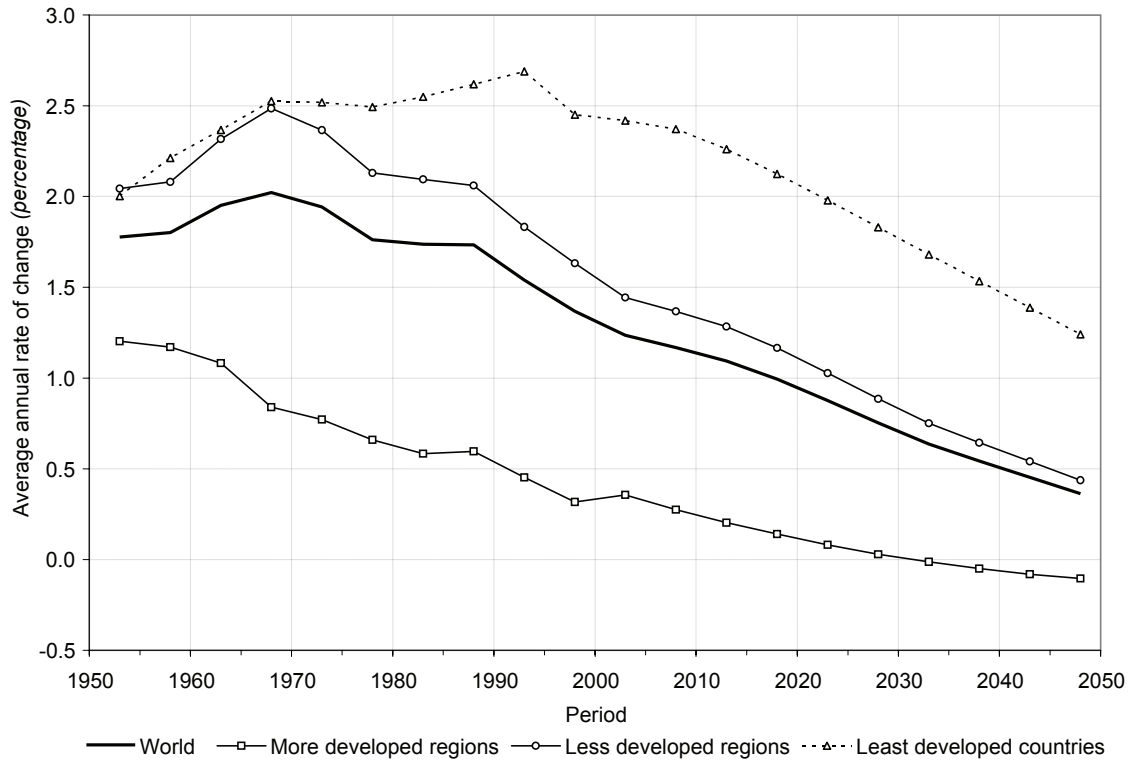
Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights. New York: United Nations.

TABLE I.4. AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF POPULATION CHANGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION AND THE POPULATION IN BROAD AGE GROUPS BY MAJOR AREA, MEDIUM VARIANT, 2005-2050 (percentage)

Major area	0-14	15-59	60+	80+	Total population
World.....	-0.03	0.65	2.43	3.38	0.76
More developed regions	-0.19	-0.36	1.13	2.16	0.05
Less developed regions.....	0.00	0.84	2.93	4.19	0.90
Least developed countries.....	0.96	2.14	3.39	3.97	1.82
Other less developed countries	-0.32	0.56	2.88	4.20	0.70
Africa.....	0.85	2.04	3.25	3.88	1.72
Asia.....	-0.34	0.48	2.74	4.04	0.65
Europe	-0.41	-0.70	0.93	2.02	-0.21
Latin America and the Caribbean	-0.41	0.59	2.92	3.91	0.71
Northern America	0.25	0.38	1.73	2.42	0.65
Oceania.....	0.17	0.68	2.08	2.97	0.84

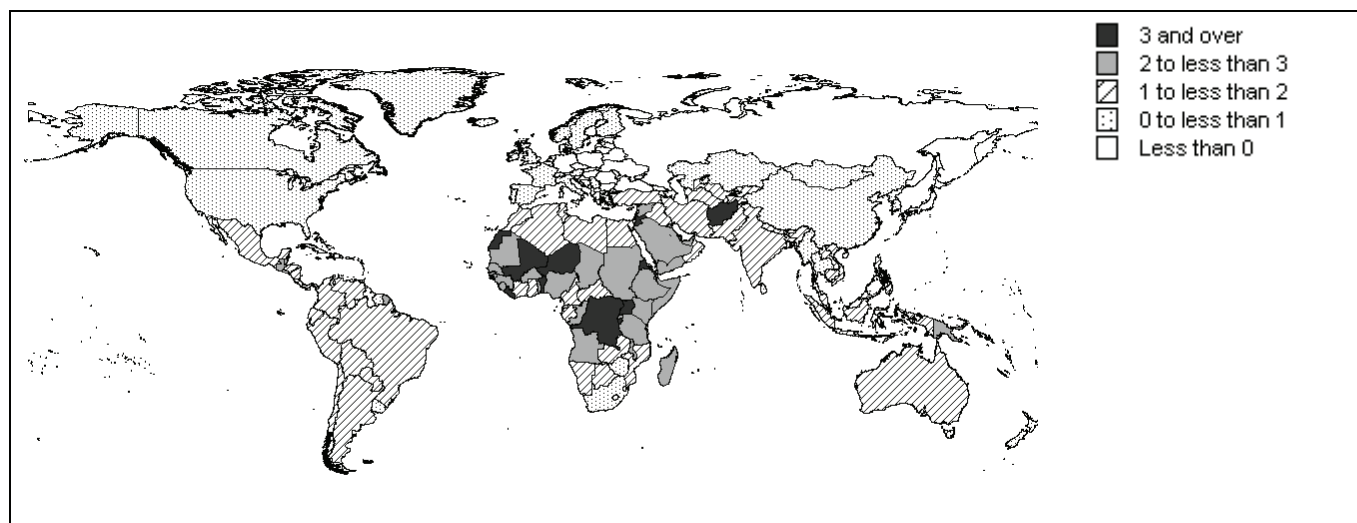
Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights. New York: United Nations.

Figure 2. Average annual rate of population change 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.

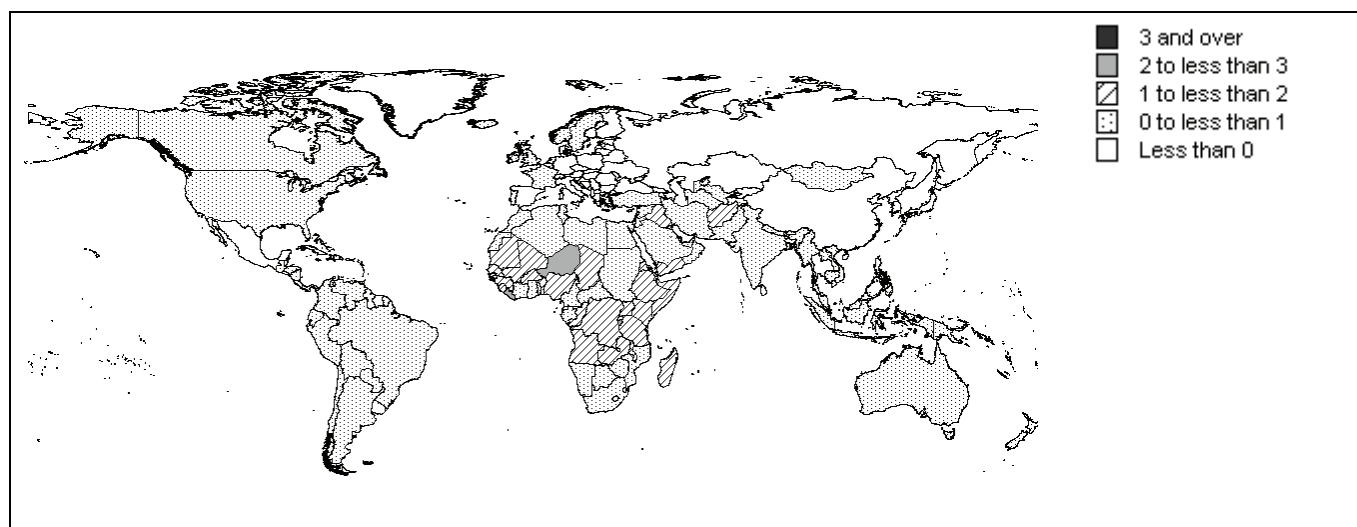
Map 1. Average annual rate of population change, 2005-2010, medium variant (percentage)



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.

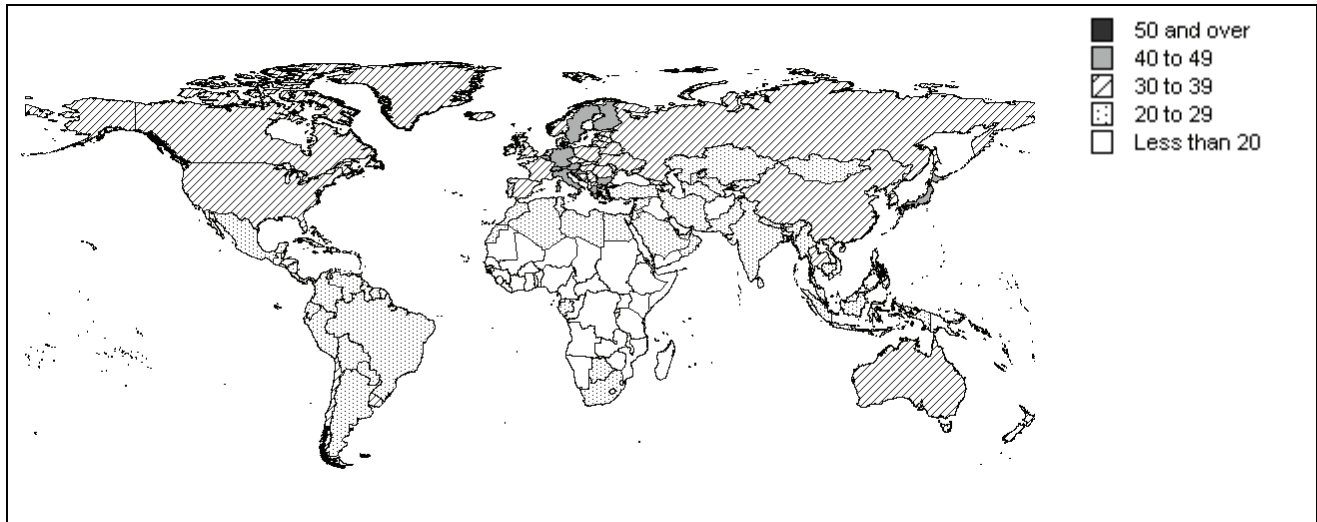
Map 2. Average annual rate of population change, 2045-2050, medium variant (percentage)



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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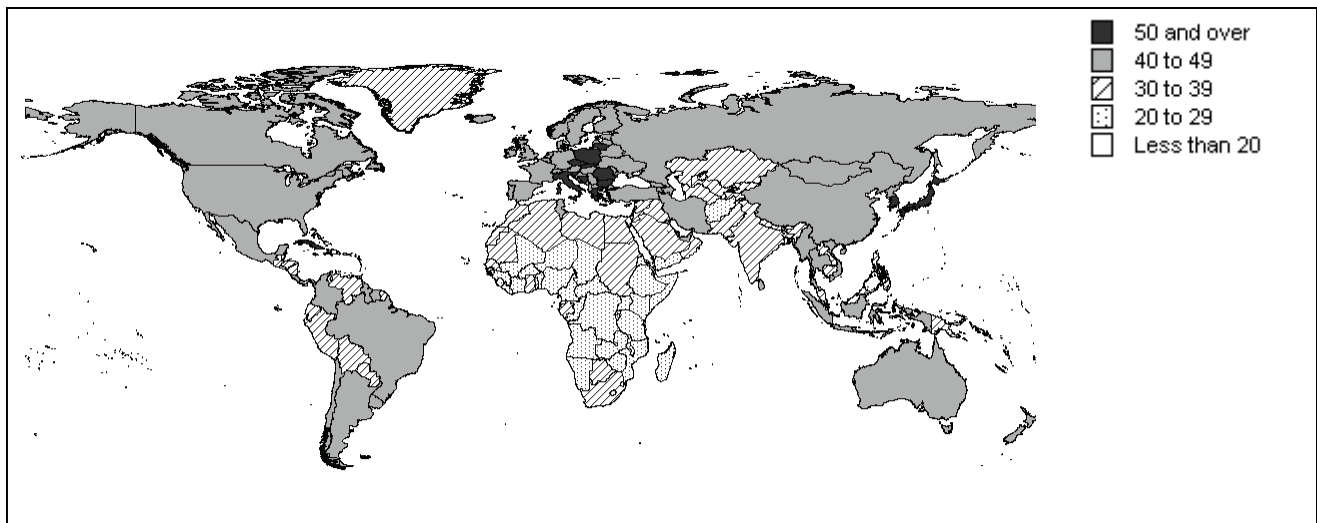
Map 3. Median age in 2005, medium variant (years)



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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Map 4. Median age in 2050, medium variant (years)



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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