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Future Trends Series - GR:REEN Project

Title of the report

World Population Trends Towards 2050 and Beyond

Area

Demography

Reporter

Future Directions International

Type of the Reporter

Think tank

Periodically updated?

No

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<http://www.futuredirections.org.au/>

Language available

English

Short summary

In this report, an examination is conducted on global population trends which focus on the gross disparities that exist between population growth rates in the world's most and least developed countries. It finds that 'this disparate distribution of population growth will present complex challenges as populations rapidly grow in areas that can least support them and decline in the richest and most developed countries.

Key trends

Population Growth Disparity Between More and Less Developed Regions

- More than 70 per cent of the world's population growth between 2010 and 2050 will occur in 24 of the world's poorest countries.
- The poorest countries seeing the most rapid population growth and highest total fertility rates will continue until 2080 when total fertility rates will reach a rough parity with those of the world's richer countries.
- Only 0.4 per cent of the world's population growth between 2010 and 2050 will occur in the 57 countries that comprise the More Developed Regions of the world (All regions of Europe (including Russia), Northern America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.)

- Population in some of these countries (Northern and Eastern Europe, in particular) is projected to decline until it stabilises in the middle of the second half of this century.
- While migration from Less Developed Regions (All regions of Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean plus Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia) may be able to offset some of this decline, the economic challenges that declining populations will impose upon society will be focused on the most developed countries of world for the foreseeable future.

Total Fertility and Population Rate Disparities

- As fertility rates in the less developed regions and least developed countries decline, population growth rates, after a lag of approximately 50 years, will decline as well. Fertility rates in the world's least developed continent (Africa) are projected to remain above that of the rest of the world until 2080.
- Some countries in the world's more developed regions currently suffer from fertility rates that have dipped to below replacement levels. Long-term effects of fertility rates that remain below replacement levels can mimic certain trends in countries with very high fertility rates. These trends include economic stagnation, lower per capita GDP and decreasing percentages of productive, employed working age adults.

Security and Rapid Population Growth

- Populations in developing countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria and Pakistan are, on average, predicted to more than double between now and 2050. As these countries already struggle with high rates of unemployment, poor education opportunities and poverty, their rapidly increasing populations will place further burdens on their already scarce resources, disaffecting even larger numbers of their populations. The threat to security from civil unrest and terrorism in these conditions is likely to rise substantially.

Capital Growth

- It is impossible for poor countries to improve the economic conditions of their populations without significant capital accumulation. As a country's population increases, a proportional amount of additional capital must be infused into the economy to maintain per capita GDP. When population growth outpaces capital accumulation, there is less money per capita in the economy, making a country poorer in per capita terms. The world's poorest countries with their rapidly increasing populations run the risk of diluting their capital stocks, making it all but impossible to improve the living conditions of their inhabitants.

Food Security

- Many of the world's poorest countries will see their populations triple or quadruple by 2050. Of the 25 countries for which the UN projects the fastest population growth between 2010 and 2050, 23 are in Africa. These countries include Niger, Burundi, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Chad and Somalia which today face widespread challenges feeding and providing security for their populations. As their populations continue to swell, their capacities to raise and effectively distribute the requisite foodstuffs to prevent famine while maintaining order in their populations will face ever more difficult challenges.

An Increasingly Urbanized World

- By 2050 it is predicted that more than 70 per cent of the earth's people will live in urban areas. This shift is driven primarily by two factors: 1) Agriculture becoming less labour intensive 2) Employment opportunities shifting to industrial and service sectors of the world's economy.

World's Aging Population

- By 2050, the world's average life expectancy at birth will be 75.5 years. By 2300, life expectancy in developed countries is projected to be 106 years.
- As the world's population lives longer and total fertility rates decrease, the average age of the world's population will continue to increase. This will create economic and fiscal stresses for governments as they struggle to meet the needs of ever more elderly populations with ever fewer prime working-age adults to support them.

Suggestions

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Methodology

Research from secondary sources

Reference to other trends reports? If yes, which reports?

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2004). World Populations in 2030.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2008). World Population Prospects, the 2008 Revisions.