

IPSOS SOUTH AFRICA, JOHANNESBURG: STRICT EMBARGO – 00H01, 11 JULY 2021

## World Population Day: An emptier planet by the turn of the century?

*“Population change isn’t a good thing or a bad thing. But it is a big thing.”<sup>1</sup>*

Studying the current status of the world population and emerging trends, it is clear that many of the “facts” that have been bandied about for years around the global population are wrong: in about three decades or so the global population will start to decline.

Recent calculations show that the current global population of 7.8 billion people will grow to about 8.5 billion before starting to decline, and at the end of this century the total population will be similar to today’s figures.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) estimates that the global population will continue to expand to about 10.9 billion by the end of the century, illustrating how considerable population predictions can differ.

Most of the global trends are not only true of the developed world, but the trends also manifest in developing countries, like those in Africa. However, Africa’s population will continue to grow at a faster rate than populations in most other areas of the world. This development will put a massive strain on already scarce resources. Just to keep living standards in Africa on the already inadequate levels of today, will require a tripling of resources and infrastructure. This daunting prospect is likely to lead to increasing disparity between rich and poor nations.<sup>3</sup> (Even before some adverse climate change issues were considered.) According to UN figures, Africa currently houses 17% of the global population, and this is predicted to increase to 39% by the year 2100.

### Some myths

- It has been said for many years that the world population growth in the twenty-first century will be like an exploding bomb, and that the population will rapidly increase to an unsustainable level by the year 2100.
- This is usually attributed to the birth of “too many babies” – especially in the developing world.
- With this ballooning of the young population, marketers should therefore focus their products and marketing on young people, as they will dominate all spheres of life.
- It is also accepted in many circles that human encroachment and pollution will destroy the natural habitat, and that there will be no mitigating circumstances to avoid the environmental calamity – such as a decline in population.

The technique of measuring the number of people globally is constantly getting more refined and more accurate, and this enables more precise projections. When studying demography, it is important to focus on the facts, but even more so to focus on the undeniable trends that are emerging. There is a saying that demographics are like glaciers, they move forward, but in a predictable way.

<sup>1</sup> Bricker, Darrell. *Emptier Planet: Are we ready for the shock of the global population decline?* Ipsos Views.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.2

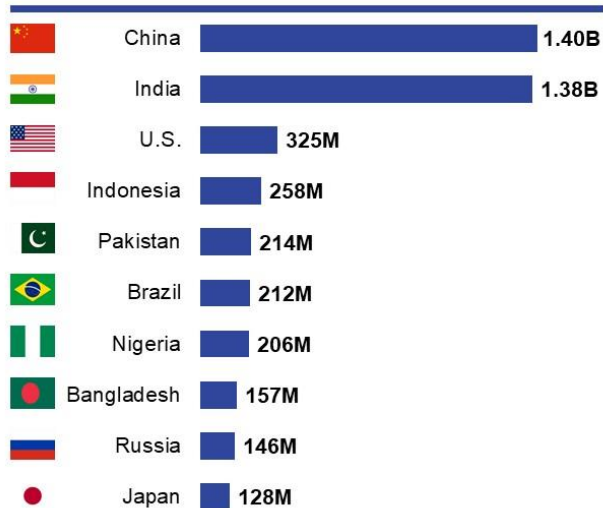
<sup>3</sup> *The Lancet*, October 2020.

In this press release, we will address the predictability of a decline in fertility, issues of aging and urbanisation and that of migration. These global trends are also true in Africa, and the continent will not escape these big trends – albeit at a slower pace than the rest of the world.

Let's look at the real numbers...<sup>4</sup>

## TOP 10 COUNTRIES BY POPULATION

2017



2100



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Source: Lancet, July 14, 2020



According to new estimates from research funded by the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and published in [The Lancet](#), Nigeria was the only African country present on the list of the Top 10 most populous countries in the world in 2017. Nigeria at that time ranked at number seven with a total population of around 206 million people. The situation will change quite a bit by 2100, and it is projected that five African countries will be on the list in 2100, namely Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Egypt.

## Globally declining fertility rates

The fertility rate in the ten most populous countries in the world was cut in half in the last fifty years, and it is very likely that this trend will continue. In 1960, each woman in the world had an average of 5.2 children, this figure has declined to the current 2.4, and the expected ratio in 2050 is that each woman will contribute an average of 2.2 children to the world population<sup>5</sup>. In Africa, the fertility rate declined from 6.7 in 1960 to 4.2 today, and it will be at an average of 2.9 in 2050. (These are estimates from the UN, but other credible sources say that the decline will be faster and even more extreme.)

This worldwide decline in fertility can be ascribed to various factors:

- Urbanisation

<sup>4</sup> The Lancet, July 2020.

<sup>5</sup> The population substitution rate is 2.1 children per woman.

- The empowerment of women, and particularly the issues of women's access to education and increasing standards of education
- Changing cultures
- The success of governmental and non-governmental programmes – many focusing on contraceptive choices and women's reproductive health
- Gender and age structures of the population

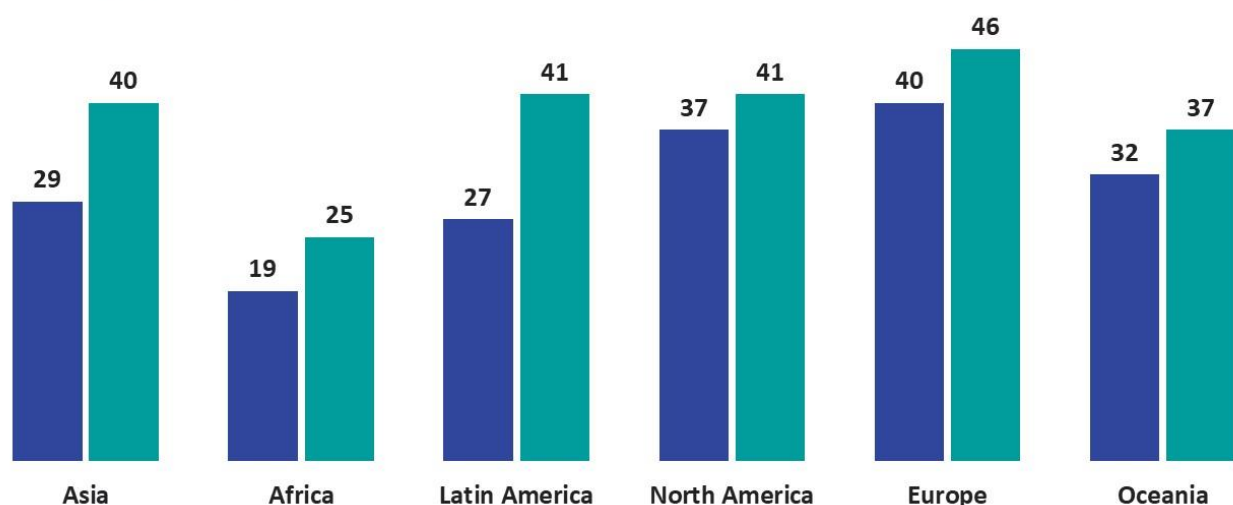
## Aging

All over the world people nowadays live longer, and life expectancy is increasing everywhere. In 1960 the life expectancy worldwide stood at 51 years, today it has increased to 73 years and it is estimated that it will be 78 in 2050. As with the changes in fertility, this upward trend in life expectancy is a universal phenomenon and is not only prevalent in the developed countries boasting excellent healthcare facilities. In Nigeria, from 1960 to 2050 life expectancy is expected to increase by 29 years – from the low 38 in 1960, through to the current 56 years, increasing to 67 in 2050.

The global population is thus getting progressively older:

## THE GLOBAL POPULATION IS GETTING OLDER

Median Age (Years), Estimates for 2010 and 2050



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Source: United Nations Statistics Division (2012)

■ 2010  
■ 2050  


From the data, it is clear that Africa is still the “youngest” continent<sup>6</sup>, with a median age of the African population at 19, with a large proportion of Africa's population still teenagers. In 2050 the median age in Africa will be 25 – and the character of the population will change to one typical of young adults, taking their dreams and aspirations into account. In Europe, the median age will be almost double that of Africa, at 46. The general character of the European population and market will thus have to focus on issues relevant to more middle-aged people. Marketers will have to focus on marketing to a more diverse population of different age groups.

<sup>6</sup> The current median age in the world is 31 and it will be 36 in 2050.

Looking at population figures in terms of age groups also brings the potentially problematic issue to the fore that there will be a decreasing number of workers in future to support those who are retired. Today there are 6.1 people of working age for each retiree in the world, and in 2050 it will decrease to 3.5.

In Africa, 12.7 people of working age today support each retiree, and it will be 8.8 in 2050. However, keep in mind that some of the most persistent problems in Africa are that of unemployment and availability of career opportunities, therefore it will be a more theoretical premise to say that the younger adults are actually “working”. This dependency ratio will exacerbate the need for job creation, education, and the development of marketable skills in Africa.

The older generation, the “Perennials”, will have a profound influence on social and political life globally, like looking at how available money should be allocated by governments to provide for social and healthcare needs. In elections, older people might also vote in a different way – concentrating more on their perceived needs (like old age grants or other provisions for old age) than those of younger people (education, housing and skills development). This older population group will also be more female – as women tend to live longer than men do.

### Urbanisation

The largest population migration in history took place over the second half of the last century, with growing urbanisation in all countries – people are on the move from rural areas to big metropolises. In 1960 a third of people (34%) lived in a city, now it is almost six in every ten (56%). The UN estimates that it will rise to over two-thirds (68%) by 2050.

In Africa, this trend is also clearly visible. In 1960 only 19% lived in a city, whereas today it is 44% and expected to increase to 59% in 2050. This mass movement brought a totally different perspective on the purported economic value of children. In a rural setting, children were often seen as able to help parents get work done on the farm, bringing in the harvest or tending the animals, however, in an urban setting an extra child is an extra mouth to feed. Other issues, like the development of slums or squatter areas, gender-based violence, malnutrition, substance abuse and others also come to the fore – causing a shift in the focus of population development.

To provide some tangible perspective on the numbers that are involved, worldwide the urban population is increasing by 50,000 every day; by 1.5 million every month (this is more than the population of Kigali in Rwanda and about three times the population of Windhoek in Namibia); and by 18 million every year (this is more than the current population of Zambia) that is added to big cities worldwide every year.

Currently, Cairo in Egypt has a population of 19.1 million, and is the ninth biggest city in the world, but in 2030 the picture will change. Lagos in Nigeria will house 24.2 million people and will be one of the biggest cities in the world.

Urban living also changes the lives of women fundamentally, increasing access to education and careers that were previously not available to them. Add the development of modern ways of contraception, and women now have – if they are lucky – a say about their own bodies and the number of children they want to have.<sup>7 8</sup>

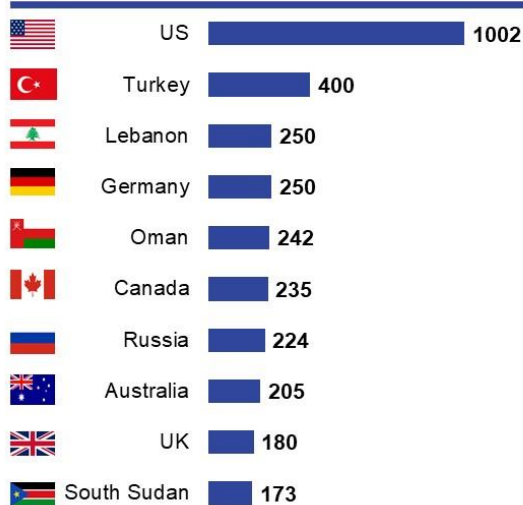
In general, urban populations are more likely to marry later in life and have children later – contributing to the lower fertility figures. The big question for Africa is how long it will take for the trends we have seen in the rest of the world, to become the new normal in Africa.

## Migration

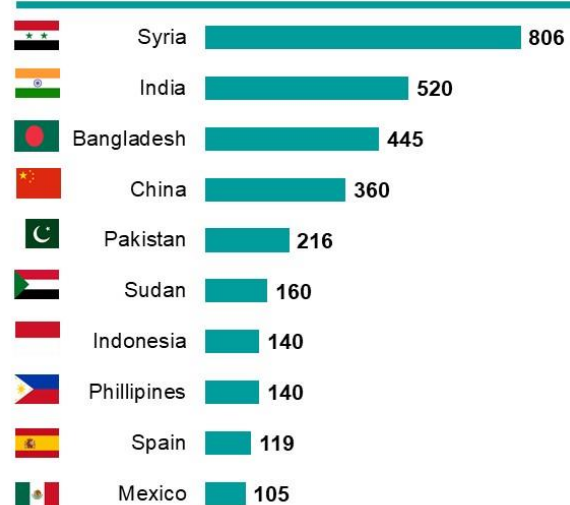
It is calculated that currently 3.4% (258 million people) of the world's population are migrants. This aspect attracts a lot of media attention, and it is clear that the sources and destinations of migrants are spread over many regions of the world.

### TOP SOURCES AND DESTINATIONS FOR MIGRANTS: 2015

#### Top Destinations



#### Top Sources



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Nevertheless, the perceptions regarding refugees and cross-border migrants are generally more serious than the factual situations, and majorities in many countries agree with the statement that *“There are too many immigrants in my country.”*

<sup>7</sup> Ipsos has published many studies on the empowerment of women and gender equality.

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting collection of articles on this topic, look at *“The Conversation”*, published on 9 July 2021 *“World Population Day: putting the spotlight on women and girls”*.

## PERCEPTIONS - SOCIETY

### Q There are too many immigrants in my country



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Base: 17,180 adults across 22 countries, online, 12th Sep – 11th Oct 2016

AGREE 2016  
DISAGREE 2016  
Ipsos

## Pandemic-paeds?

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was speculation that lockdown and staying at home will lead to an increase in the birth rate – a sort of a mini baby boom.

However, early indications are that this is not necessarily true. Information is still patchy, but the [Brookings Institute](#) estimated that 300,000 babies will not be born in the USA as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, while Canada just reported its lowest birth-rate in history. In addition, the just released Census in China shows almost a 20% decline in China's birth rate between 2020 and 2021.

This tendency, however, is not clear-cut and there is a hypothesis that lockdown and the resulting disrupted access to birth control could still lead to a mini baby boom in Africa and other developing regions.

So far Covid-19 has caused depressed fertility rates in some areas, disrupted immigration, excessive deaths among the elderly and (in some areas) a (possibly temporarily) outmigration from major cities.

Are these Covid-19 trends also true in Africa? The jury is still out...

## Population trends to watch and measure

- The population bust.  
(Different/Accurate predictions and checking trends)
- The march of the "Perennials".



*(Older people often have more access to money, how will this influence marketing, socioeconomics and voting trends?)*

- The millennial malaise.  
*(Pressure on younger people to find work and look after older people)*
- “Womenomics” / “Sheconomy” / “Whither boys and men?”  
*(The population trends supporting a bigger role for women in future)*
- Living alone, together.  
*(This will be the biggest growth in the developed world – what will family structures and consumers look like in future?)*
- We are developing into a metropolitan species.  
*(Urbanisation and Migration. How will this change people?).*

## The world’s eyes will be on Africa:

- Although the population trends are clear – and also supported by information from Africa, this continent, with its relatively younger population will be the biggest source of immigrants and labour for the rest of the world in future (with rapidly aging populations, shrinking workforces and fewer taxpayers in other areas).
- Uneven population growth rates will lead to new power alignments in the world and there will be geopolitical shifts. According to the article in the Lancet the USA, China, India and Nigeria will be dominant powers in future. (Nigeria is currently #28 in terms of GDP, but it is predicted that it will be in the top 10 by the end of the century.)<sup>9</sup>
- Africa, rich in natural resources, could be a future source of initiative, innovation, and economic growth.

## For further reading:

1. [Bricker, Darrell](#) and Ibbitson, John. [Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline](#) (Crown, New York, 2019)
2. Bricker, Darrell. [Empty Planet: Are we ready for the shock of the global population decline?](#) (Ipsos Views.)
3. The UN Population Division. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>
4. Population projections by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, published in The Lancet. [https://www.thelancet.com/article/S01406736\(20\)30677-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/article/S01406736(20)30677-2/fulltext)
5. The Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/05/05/the-coming-covid-19-baby-bust-is-here/>
6. [www.thelancet.com](https://www.thelancet.com) October 2020.

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<sup>9</sup> The Lancet, July, 2020



# Press Release - Continued

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