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International Youth Day, 12 August 2019

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According to the latest United Nations estimates of the world's population, in 2019 youth numbered 1.2 billion persons between ages 15 and 24 years, or around one in every six persons worldwide.¹ The number of youth in the world is projected to grow by 7 per cent to 1.3 billion by 2030, the target date for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The following key messages are based on World Population Prospects 2019 and other recent or forthcoming publications by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

Ten key messages

1. The global youth population is expected to peak at nearly 1.4 billion persons around 2065

In 2019, there are about 1.2 billion youth aged 15 to 24 years in the world, or 16 per cent of the global population. Around 2065, the world's youth population is projected to reach its peak, at just under 1.4 billion persons (13%). The share of youth in the total population peaked at 19.3 per cent in 1985. In 2019, Central and Southern Asia were home to the largest number of youth (361 million), followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (307 million) and sub-Saharan Africa (211 million).

2. The youth population in the poorest countries is projected to increase 62 per cent by 2050

In the 47 least developed countries,² the youth population is projected to increase by 62 per cent over the next three decades, rising from 207 million in 2019 to 336 million in 2050. The largest increases are expected in sub-Saharan Africa (+89%), Oceania³ (+38%) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (+28%).

3. Education and youth employment are essential for reaping the "demographic dividend"

The temporary increase in the relative size of the working-age population following a sustained decline in the fertility level offers an opportunity for a "demographic dividend", which may lead to increased investments and an accelerated rate of economic growth per capita. The ability of countries to harness this dividend and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 depends critically on ensuring access to health care (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) for all young people, and on providing productive employment and decent work for all, especially youth (SDG 8).

4. By 2050, some regions will experience a reduction in their youth populations

Decreasing youth populations are the result of sustained low levels of fertility, and, in some places, high rates of emigration. The regions that are projected to experience the largest decrease in the number of young people are Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (a decrease of 15%), Latin America and the Caribbean (-13%), and Europe and Northern America (-5%). A smaller youth population will translate into fewer entrants into the labour force.

1. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth. Report of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year. A/36/215, annex.

2. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/ldc_list.pdf

3. Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

5. Childbearing among youth decreases at a faster pace than among all women

Fertility among women aged 15 to 24 years fell from 244 births per 1,000 women during 1990-1995 to 178 births per woman during 2015-2020, a decrease of 27 per cent. During this period, the decrease in the number of births among adolescents aged 15 to 19 years (-34%) exceeded that of young women aged 20 to 24 years (-25%) and of women aged 15 to 49 years (-18%). The global share of births to mothers aged 15 to 19 years, expressed as a fraction of all births, fell from 11 per cent during 1990-1995 to 9 per cent during 2015-2020.

6. Childbearing among young people remains high in some developing regions

In 2019, the share of births to mothers aged 15 to 24 years remains above the global average of 36 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean (41%) and in Central and Southern Asia (38%). For women aged 15 to 19 years, fertility remains relatively high also in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, except Japan. By 2045-2050, the proportion of births among mothers aged 15 to 24 years is projected to exceed the global average of 30 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean (33% in both regions).

7. While young women's fertility is projected to fall globally, regional trends differ greatly

Between 2015-2020 and 2045-2050, the birth rate among women aged 15 to 24 years is projected to fall by 26 per cent, more than twice the rate for women aged 15 to 49 years (-11%). This decrease is projected to be the most pronounced in Europe and Northern America (-44%), followed by Central and Southern Asia (-40%), Australia and New Zealand (-36%), sub-Saharan Africa (-35%), Latin America and the Caribbean (-30%), Northern Africa and Western Asia (-28%), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (-27%) and Oceania³ (-27%).

8. Contraceptive use among adolescents has increased worldwide since 1990

Worldwide, the prevalence of contraceptive use among unmarried adolescents aged 15 to 19 years increased from 3.8 per cent in 1990 to 7.4 per cent in 2019. Contraceptive use among married adolescents was higher, increasing from 15 per cent in 1990 to 31 per cent in 2019. Despite the rise in contraceptive use among adolescents, there has been only a modest reduction in the unmet need for family planning in this age group.

9. Postponement of marriage is key to reducing adolescent fertility

Marriage influences both contraceptive use and adolescent childbearing. Between 1990 and 2019, the proportion of adolescents aged 15 to 19 years who were married or in a union fell by 23 percentage points in Central and Southern Asia, followed by sub-Saharan Africa (12 percentage points), while Latin America and the Caribbean experienced only a small decrease (1 percentage point). Among women aged 20 to 24 years, the proportion who were married or in a union fell in all regions, with the largest reduction in Europe and Northern America (21 percentage points).

10. The share of youth migrants varies greatly among regions

In 2017, the estimated number of young people aged 15 to 24 years living outside their country of birth reached 28 million, constituting 11 per cent of the global migrant population (258 million). The proportion of migrants aged 15 to 24 years among all international migrants is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa (16%), followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (13%), Latin America and the Caribbean (13%), Central and Southern Asia (12%), Northern Africa and Western Asia (12%), Oceania (11%), and Europe and Northern America (9%).



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These key messages are based on *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* presenting the main results of the 26th round of global population estimates and projections, and on other recent and forthcoming publications prepared by the Population Division, available at www.unpopulation.org.