Question and answers related to United Nations Population

1. Why use the population estimates and projections of the United Nations Population Division?

The population estimates and projections of the United Nations population division ensures consistency and comparability of estimates and projections within countries and between countries over time.

2. What is the methodology?

The Population Division of the United Nations estimates historical demographic trends for the period from 1950 to the present and projects future population trends out to 2100. The estimates are based on all available sources of data on population size and levels of fertility, mortality and international migration for 235 distinct countries or areas comprising the total population of the world.

A description of the empirical data that inform the latest set of estimates is available under Data sources. In total, the 2019 revision is based on information from:

- 1,690 population and housing censuses for 235 countries or areas, including 236 censuses conducted since 2010;
- vital registration of births and deaths from 163 countries or areas;
- 2,700 surveys, including demographic and health surveys, conducted in 235 countries or areas, among which 540 were administered in 2010 or later; · official statistics reported to the Demographic Yearbook of the United Nations;
- Population registers and other administrative sources on international migration statistics.
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In addition to the national data sources described above, the 2019 revision has considered international estimates from the following sources:

- Refugee statistics from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);

- Estimated time series of adult HIV prevalence and coverage of antiretroviral treatment from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS);
- Estimated time series of infant and under-five mortality from the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN-IGME);
- estimates of international migration flows and stocks of foreign-born persons from the United Nations;
- Various other series of international estimates produced by international and regional organizations, and academic research institutions*.

These data sources served to reconstruct population changes in each country or area from 1950 until the present. In doing so, the Population Division used the cohort-component method (United Nations, 1956) to ensure internal consistency by age and sex and over time, and between the three demographic components of change (fertility, mortality and migration) and the enumerated population. The cohort-component method was also used to project population trends until 2100 using a variety of demographic assumptions concerning the components of population change.

In projecting future levels of fertility and mortality, probabilistic methods were used to reflect the uncertainty of the projections based on the historical variability of changes in each variable. The method takes into account the past experience of each country, while also reflecting uncertainty about future changes based on the past experience of other countries under similar conditions. The medium-variant projection corresponds to the median of several thousand distinct trajectories of each demographic component derived using the probabilistic model of the variability in changes over time.

Prediction intervals reflect the spread in the distribution of outcomes across the projected trajectories and thus provide an assessment of the uncertainty inherent in the medium-variant projection. In addition, a number of projection variants were produced to convey the sensitivity of the medium-variant projection to changes in the underlying assumptions, and to explore the implications of alternative future scenarios of population change (see Definition of projection variants).

3. Where can I find annual data or data by single-year age groups?

Annually interpolated time series for selected demographic indicators and population by single-year age groups are available for download in Excel or CSV file format from the Download Center. Note that special interpolation routines were used to produce estimates and projections for single calendar years (e.g., 1950, 1951, etc.) and for single-year age groups (e.g., 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc.). It must be noted, however, that interpolation procedures cannot recover the true series of events or the true composition of an aggregated age group. For further details about the interpolation procedures used, see report World Population Prospects 2019: Methodology of the United Nations Population Estimates and Projections.

4. When will the next Revision of the World Population Prospects be released?

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations issues a new Revision every two years. The next one is due in the second half of 2021.

5. Who is using the results of World Population Prospects?

The users of World Population Prospects are many and varied. All entities of the United Nations system use the Population Division's population estimates for the calculation of indicators that require population as an input. The Division's population projections are also used in projecting other population-related variables or in modelling complex systems that use population is an exogenous variable. In addition, several entities and organizations of the United Nations distribute the results of World Population Prospects through their own databases and websites (e.g., the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Health Organization, UNFPA, Statistics Division/DESA, United Nations Development Programme, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization). In addition, the data are used by many groups belonging to civil society, from school-children learning about population to journalists to academics. Being the official United Nations population estimates and projections, the results of World Population Prospects are considered to embody the authoritative view of population levels, trends and characteristics.

6. Why do the estimates in World Population Prospects sometimes differ from official statistics?

Official statistics are not very perfect. All data have deficiencies. Official demographic statistics are affected by incompleteness of coverage, lack of timeliness and errors in the reporting or coding of the basic information. The analysis carried out by the Population Division takes into account those deficiencies and seeks to establish past population trends by resolving the inconsistencies affecting the basic data. Use of the cohort-component method to reconstruct populations is the major tool to ensure that the population trends estimated by the Population Division are internally consistent. See Methodology of the United Nations Population Estimates and Projections for further details. National Statistical Offices are well aware of the inconsistencies among data generated by different sources. Even in countries with advanced statistical systems, it is common for official statistical series to be revised retrospectively as new data become available and inconsistencies are corrected.

7. What happens then with the population of the country?

It is very important that countries review key data, such as when was the last population census in their country and identify factors that may be influencing the increase or decrease, including mass migration phenomena. Likewise, they must continue to analyze the information using official statistics and comparing them with that of the population sources of the United Nations Population Division in order to reveal gaps that may present and find the best way to inform the decisions that the country takes. In relation to the surveillance of diseases prevented by vaccination.

Source: Population Division World Population Prospect 2019 Frequently Asked Questions [Internet]
Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/FAQs/