FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRB *WORLD POPULATION DATA SHEET*

by Carl Haub and Mary Mederios Kent

Population Reference Bureau staff are often asked how to interpret PRB's annual *World Population Data Sheet* and about current population trends. In the following pages, we answer some of the questions we are frequently asked by educators, journalists, and others interested in population dynamics.

Has world population growth slowed? Is the population declining?

Some stories in the popular media suggest that world population growth has stopped—but world population is still increasing at 1.2 percent per year, resulting in an additional 80 million people annually. Less developed countries account for 99 percent of that growth with wide variations by region (see figure). Declines in birth rates have slowed the rate of population growth over the past 50 years, and population is declining in a few countries: These declines caused some to speculate that population growth is no longer a concern.

How are countries classified as less developed and more developed?

The PRB *World Population Data Sheet* uses the United Nations classification of more developed and less developed, also commonly referred to as developed and developing. The UN classifies all countries in the regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania as less developed, with three exceptions: Australia, Japan, and New Zealand. These countries, and all countries in North America and Europe, are classified as more developed countries. There are, of course, many ways in which countries can be grouped. Most geographers classify Mexico as a North American country (which would make it a more developed country), but the UN considers Mexico as Central American, and therefore, a less developed country.

Splitting the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and other former Soviet republics in Asia were classified as less developed. Russia, Moldova, and other former Soviet republics in Europe were included in the more developed category. Previously, the UN classified the entire Soviet Union as a developed region/country.

Where do the *World Population Data Sheet* figures come from?

PRB uses all possible sources to compile its *Data Sheet*. For countries with good censuses and complete registration of births and deaths (primarily more developed countries), the latest data are used from national statistical offices. These sources include statistical yearbooks, monthly statistical bulletins, direct communication, and statistical websites. The 2005 *Data Sheet* includes 2004 statistics for many developed and some developing countries. For most countries, the quality and year of estimates vary widely depending on such factors as the recency and completeness of censuses and the availability of demographic surveys. These data are supplemented by research studies from national and international institutions, direct consultation with country experts, and PRB's own demographic analysis. Because PRB updates all figures annually, *Data Sheets* from different years should not be used as a time series.

Natural Population Increase or Decrease in 2005 by Country or Region (Population in millions)

NOTE: Natural increase equals births minus deaths. It does not account for net migration.
SOURCE: PRB, *2005 World Population Data Sheet.*

How is the population growth rate calculated?

The population growth rate shown on the *World Population Data Sheet* is the difference between the annual **crude birth rate** and the **crude death rate**, customarily expressed as a percentage. This is the **rate of natural increase (RNI)**. At the world level, the RNI is equivalent to the population growth rate. The RNI does not account for population loss or gain from migration, so it does not reflect actual population change in countries with significant net immigration or emigration. In the United States, for example, the RNI is 0.6 percent, but the annual population growth rate is actually higher, 1.0 percent, because the United States has net immigration of about 1.2 million people annually. Italy has a negative RNI because it has more deaths than births, but its population is not yet declining because it has net immigration. For many countries, and for most regions, the RNI is a reasonable indicator of total population change.

How reliable are population projections to 2025 or 2050?

A population projection is not a true forecast but the result of **assumptions** about current and future fertility, mortality, and migration. For developing countries with high fertility, projections have a high degree of uncertainty. Demographers must make assumptions about the speed and timing of fertility decline based on such factors as estimates of contraceptive use, the number of children couples say they want to have, the availability of reproductive health services, and the effectiveness of government policies that affect population change. Patterns of fertility decline have varied widely throughout the world. Mortality, represented on the *World Population Data Sheet* by the infant mortality rate and life expectancy at birth, usually has less effect than fertility on population projections, except in countries with a low life expectancy, a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, or both. Finally, unexpected variations in immigration will affect population trends in some countries.

Do projections take AIDS into account? Isn't AIDS causing Africa's population to decline?

Population projections shown on the *World Population Data Sheet* take HIV/AIDS into

How many countries are on the *World Population Data Sheet*?

There are 207 countries listed on the 2005 *Data Sheet*, arranged by their geographic region and subregion. An additional 24 countries or territories are included in the subregional and regional totals, but are not shown separately, usually because they have too few people. (The criteria for including countries are described below.) Available statistics for all 231 countries included in the *Data Sheet* totals may be accessed at www.prb.org under the "Data by Country" link.

Why are small countries such as Bermuda not shown on the *World Population Data Sheet*?

The annual *Data Sheet* prints statistics for all countries or territories with a population of 150,000 or more and smaller countries that are members of the United Nations. Bermuda, an overseas territory of the United Kingdom with an elected government, has a population well below 150,000 and is not a UN member. It is not shown on the *Data Sheet*. Puerto Rico, a commonwealth associated with the United States, is not a UN member, but is on the *Data Sheet* because of its 3.9 million population. Andorra's population is only 74,000, but it is on the *Data Sheet* because it is a UN member.

Where is the Middle East on the *World Population Data Sheet*?

The *Data Sheet* shows totals for six major geographic regions and 17 subregions, but does not separate out the Middle East. There is no standard definition of the Middle East—a term first used by the British in the 19th century. The region may be defined strictly by geography, or by religion, ethnicity, or culture. The region's boundaries may extend from North Africa as far as Afghanistan depending on the definition. The countries most commonly included in the Middle East are primarily in Western Asia on the *Data Sheet*, but some may be found in South-Central Asia (Iran, for example) and North Africa (Egypt).

account in seriously affected countries, based on analysis and projections prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau and the UN Population Division. Population projections for some African countries, such as Botswana, Lesotho, and South Africa, show population decline or minimal growth because of high levels of HIV/AIDS mortality. But, overall, current high fertility levels ensure population growth for the African region, with steep increases projected in many countries, including Nigeria and Uganda (see figure).

How many children are women having today?

The total fertility rate (TFR) provides an estimate of the average number of children a woman would have if the rate of childbearing of a particular year were to remain constant throughout her lifetime. The TFR does not measure the actual number of children a woman or group of women will have because the rate of childbearing is likely to change during their lifetimes. The average world TFR was 2.7 children per woman in 2005, but the values ranged from 8.0 in Niger to 1.2 in Poland, South Korea, and nine other countries.

Why is the two-child family average so important?

When a country's total fertility rate (TFR) is about 2.1 children per woman, fertility is often said to be at **replacement level**—that is, each couple is having just the number of children needed to replace itself in the population. If the TFR holds constant at replacement level, a country's population will eventually stop growing because births and deaths will reach equilibrium. Replacement-level fertility is slightly above two children per couple because there are about 5 percent more boys born than girls, and because some daughters will die before they reach the end of their childbearing years. Replacement level is 2.1 in low-mortality countries such as the United States but is higher in countries with higher mortality.

Many countries have a TFR below the two-child replacement level. Why aren't those countries declining in population size?

Many countries with below-replacement fertility still have relatively "young" age structures, often defined as the percent of population below age 15, because they have had low fertility for a relatively short time. Ireland's population is younger than Germany's primarily because Ireland's fertility has been higher: above 2 children per woman until about 1992. Germany's fertility has been well below this level for several decades. About 21 percent of Irish are under age 15, compared with 15 percent of Germans. Ireland has a greater proportion of women in or entering the reproductive ages, which provides **momentum** for population growth at least until 2050, even with below-replacement fertility. Thailand, South Korea, and many other countries with below replacement-level fertility also are still growing thanks to the

Population Projection for 2050 in Four African Countries (Population in millions)
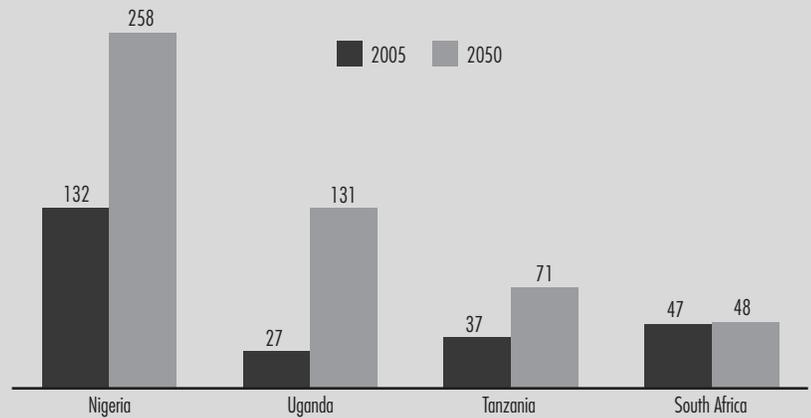
SOURCE: PRB, *2005 World Population Data Sheet.*

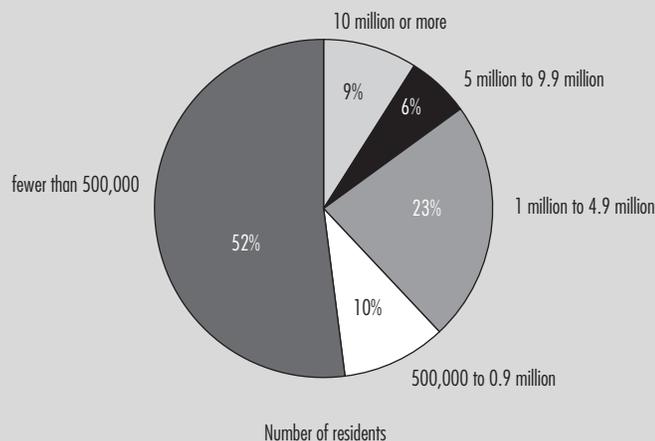## Can I use *World Population Data Sheets* of successive years to graph trends in population?

All figures on the *Data Sheet* are updated each year based on the most recent information available. As a result, *Data Sheets* from different years cannot be used as a time series. A new census, for example, may suggest a larger or smaller population than previously estimated. This happened with the 2000 U.S. Census, when the U.S. population total was about 7 million higher than expected. Fertility rates in less developed countries are often based on surveys taken years earlier that, for example, might have shown a gradual fertility decline. A newly released survey might reveal that the decline was faster or slower than anticipated based on the earlier surveys.

I can't find population "doubling time" on the *World Population Data Sheet.* How can I calculate doubling time?

Doubling time indicates the number of years it would take for a population to double in size if the current rate of natural increase (RNI) remained *constant*. This rarely happens, because the RNI is likely to fall, rise, or fluctuate. The *Data Sheet* previously carried doubling time, but it was dropped, in part because it was often mistaken for a population projection. Doubling time can be calculated easily by dividing the RNI, as a percentage, into the number 70 (or, for greater accuracy, 69.3). The doubling time for Sudan's population, with its RNI of 2.7 per 100 in 2005, would be just under 26 years (69.3/2.7=25.7).

momentum provided by their relatively young populations. As their populations age, this growth momentum will subside.

World Urban Population by Size of Place, 2005

- 10 million or more: 9%
- 5 million to 9.9 million: 6%
- 1 million to 4.9 million: 23%
- 500,000 to 0.9 million: 10%
- fewer than 500,000: 52%

Number of residents

Nearly one-half of the world's population resides in urban areas. What is an "urban" area?

The *2005 World Population Data Sheet* shows that about 47 percent of the world lives in urban areas. The UN projects that a majority will be urban-dwellers by 2007, but most urbanites will live in smaller- and medium-sized cities and towns—not large teeming metropolises like Cairo, Egypt; Lagos, Nigeria; or São Paulo, Brazil. In 2005, 52 percent of the urban population lived in urban areas with fewer than 500,000 residents (see figure).

The definition of "urban" varies substantially from one country to another and often includes places with relatively small populations. Also, not all countries have a definition of urban. The mini-mum population size required for being urban typically ranges between 2,000 and 10,000, but occasionally runs even higher. In Liberia, towns of 2,000 or more are considered urban. In the United States, the minimum for an urban place is 2,500; in Vietnam, the minimum is 4,000, while it is 5,000 in India, and 20,000 in Nigeria. The *Data Sheet* uses national definitions and statistics on urban areas where available, supplemented by UN projections.

For More Information

To obtain copies of this policy brief or the *World Population Data Sheet*, contact:

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Women have longer life expectancies than men in every country on the *World Population Data Sheet.* Why is this?

Women have longer life expectancies than men in nearly every society today, and this gender gap is often greater in countries with higher life expectan-cies. With few exceptions, males have a greater risk of dying at every age, and many more women than men survive to the oldest ages. The gender gap in life expectancy is partially explained by behavioral differences that affect health—for example, men in most cultures are more likely than women to smoke, use drugs, or engage in dangerous activities. But there are also apparent biological factors that favor women's greater longevity.

PRB Resources

PRB has a wide range of resources on population dynamics and population-related issues. Some of the most popular materials that deal with broad demographic definitions and trends are:

DataFinder, at www.prb.org/datafinder

Joseph A. McFalls Jr. "Population: A Lively Introduction," *Population Bulletin* 58, no. 4 (2003).

Arthur Haupt and Thomas T. Kane. *Population Handbook: A Quick Guide to Population Dynamics*, 5th ed. (2004).

Population Reference Bureau Staff. "World Population Transitions," *Population Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (2004) (online only).

All publications are available at www.prb.org; selected titles are available in print from PRB's store. PRB materials are available free to audiences in developing countries (quantities may be limited).

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