

## ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

**Definitions.** While there are no universally accepted definitions of adolescence and youth, the United Nations understands adolescents to include persons aged 10-19 years and youth as those between 15-24 years for statistical purposes without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.<sup>1</sup> Together, adolescents and youth are referred to as young people, encompassing the ages of 10-24 years. Due to data limitations, these terms can refer to varying age groups that are separately defined as required.

**Size.** There are over 1.8 billion young people in the world today, 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries, where they tend to make up a large proportion of the population. There are more than 235 million youth in India and 225 million in China alone.

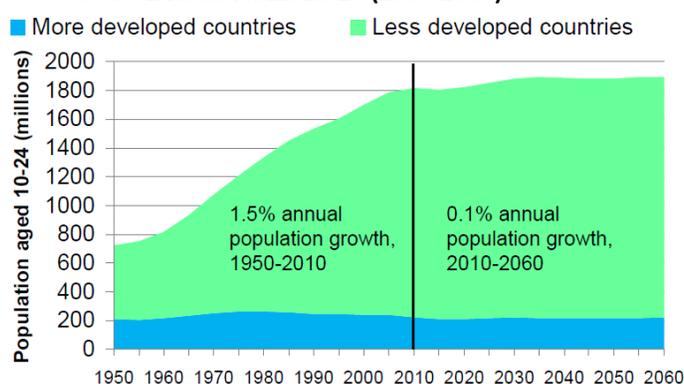
WORLD POPULATION (MEDIUM VARIANT) <sup>2</sup>		
Age group	2010 (thousands)	2050 (thousands)
10-14	602,054	632,965
15-19	606,144	627,881
20-24	606,816	624,050
Total	1,815,014	1,884,896

**Global trends.** The number of adolescents and youth today is at an all-time high, but that number might not increase considerably in coming decades if global fertility continues to decline. The proportion of young people is actually set to decline from 17.6 per cent in 2010 to 13.5 per cent in 2050.<sup>3</sup>

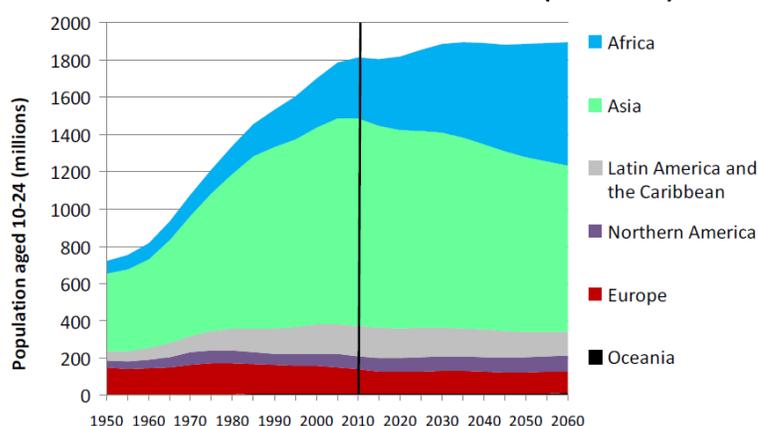
**Regional trends.** The proportion of the world's young people between the ages of 12-24 years living in Africa is expected to rise from 18 per cent in 2012 to 28 per cent by 2040, while the shares of all other regions will decline. The region comprising Asia and the Pacific is expected to experience the sharpest decline, from 61 per cent in 2012 to 52 per cent by 2040.<sup>4</sup>

**Health.** Even though youth is in general the healthiest period of life, the international differences of mortality amongst youth are striking. In more developed regions, Northern Africa, Eastern Asia and Western Asia only 1 per cent or less of 15-year olds do not survive to their 25th birthday. Concurrently, the odds of dying during youth are almost twice as high in South Asia, and four times higher in

POPULATION AGED 10-24 (1950-2060)



POPULATION REGIONAL VARIATIONS (1950-2060)



<sup>1</sup> Report of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year (A/36/215 annex)

<sup>2</sup> Population Division UN-DESA World Population Prospects: 2010 Revision

<sup>3</sup> Population Division UN-DESA World Population Prospects: 2010 Revision

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Mason, "Adolescents and Youth: Their Numbers and Economic Roles", Keynote Presentation at 45<sup>th</sup> Commission on Population and Development, based on Population Division UN-DESA World Population Prospects: 2010 Revision

sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup> Despite some regional variations, there is commonality in the causes of adolescent deaths worldwide. The causes of adolescent death include communicable diseases (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and lower respiratory-tract infection) and non-communicable diseases related to problem behaviours (motor vehicle fatalities, violence, self-harm, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and risky sex leading to early or unintended pregnancy).<sup>6</sup>

**Marriage.** Data from Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in 80 countries since 2005 indicate that in 23 of them at least 10 per cent of women aged 20-24 at the time of the interview had married before age 15. Among those countries, 16 were in Africa, 5 were in Asia and the Pacific and 2 were in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even when the minimum age at marriage with parental consent was 15 or 16, several countries had a high proportion of young women who had married before age 15. Furthermore, in countries where no minimum age was stipulated for women marrying with parental consent, the percentage of young women married before age varied markedly.<sup>7</sup>

**Sexual activity.** Data from Demographic and Health Surveys since 2005 for 53 countries, including 31 in Africa, indicate that the share of women beginning sexual activity before marriage is large. Thus, the percentage of women aged 20-24 at the time of interview who reported having begun sexual activity before age 20 is generally higher than the percentage who married before age 20 with the exception of a few countries in Asia. Because contraceptive use is low among adolescent women, early initiation of sexual activity, whether after marriage or before, is associated with higher levels of adolescent fertility.<sup>8</sup>

**Adolescent Birth Rate.** The adolescent birth rate has declined in all regions since 1990, but it is still high in Africa at 101 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2008, in South Asia at 77 births per 1,000 and in Latin America and the Caribbean at 73 births per 1,000. The adolescent birth rate in developing countries was 52.3 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2000 — more than double that of developed countries, which was 23.4 births per 1,000.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Adolescents, Youth and Development UN-DESA (ESA/P/WP/225)

<sup>6</sup> Patton et al. "Global patterns of mortality in young people" *The Lancet* 2009; 374: 881-892

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on Adolescents and Youth (E/CN.9/2012/4)

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on Adolescents and Youth (E/CN.9/2012/4)

<sup>9</sup> MDG Report 2012, United Nations