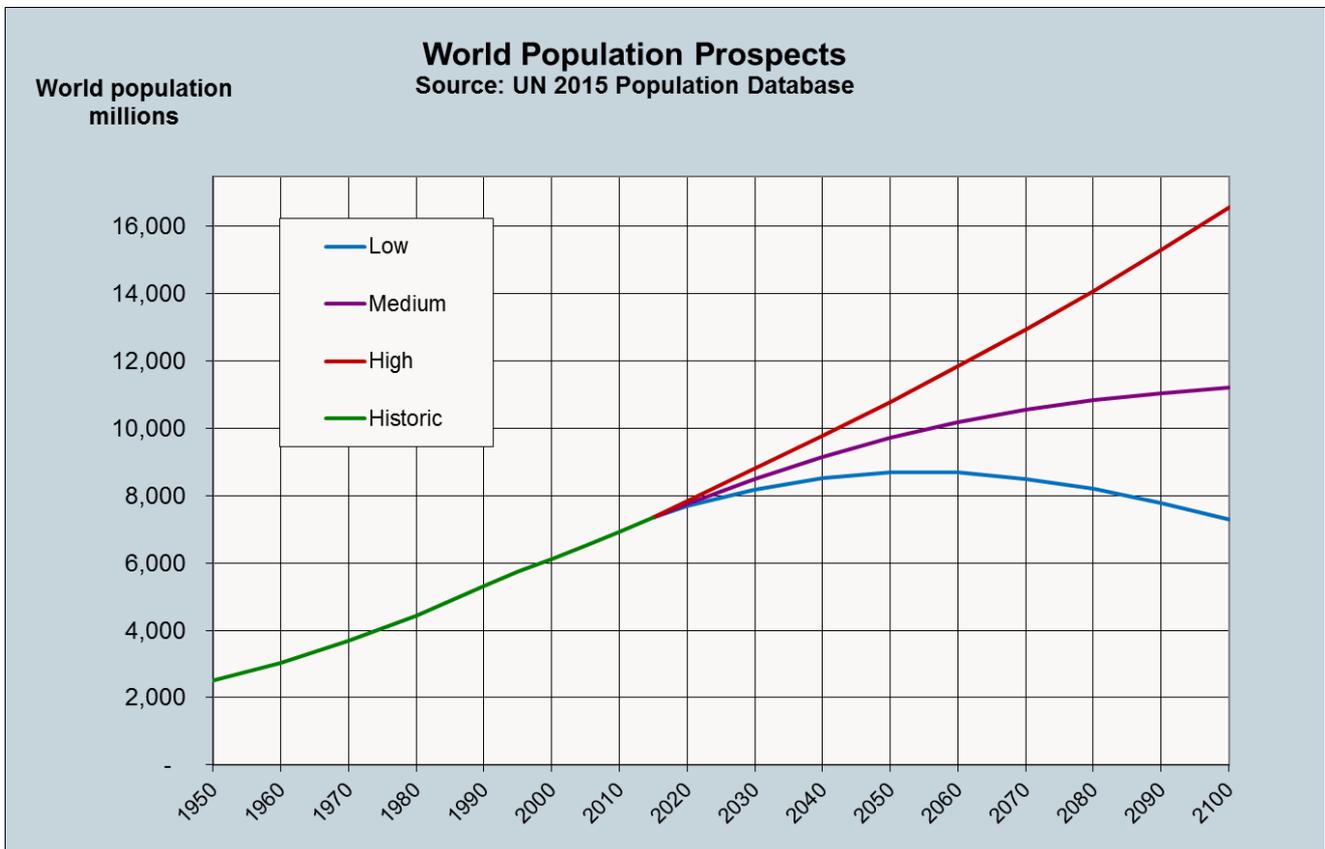




Current population trends

The future population growth of the world is difficult to predict accurately. A range of projections has been published by organizations such as the United Nations and the US Census Bureau, depending on different assumptions of birth rates and other factors affecting numbers. These projections are revised from time to time, based on updated information and improved modelling techniques. The majority of estimates predict the world population will be between 8.7 and 10.8 billion in 2050.¹

Longer-range projections indicate that the world population might eventually peak, but the timing and height of the peak is uncertain. Only in the WHO's low-growth assumptions case is it likely to occur before 2100 and, even in that case, the population is likely to be around 53 per cent higher than in 2015. Inevitably, this will put further demands on food, water, energy and other limited resources necessary to sustain human populations.



These projections, of course, assume some continuity and ignore disaster scenarios. Humanity is already using natural resources at an unsustainable rate, and placing unsustainable pressure on the natural environment and the **ecosystems** on which we depend. Thus it is quite possible that a critical “tipping point” will be reached at which the present order breaks down, the ensuing disaster leading to a sudden population crash.

We do not know when or how likely it is that this point may be reached. Nor do we know what will trigger such a disaster, or what form it is most likely to take. War, global epidemic, widespread crop failure as a result of climate change, a sudden and sharp increase in the price of oil and gas, catastrophic breakdown of international trade or some other event could be the trigger. What is clear is that the larger the world population becomes, the sooner such a “tipping point” will be reached, and the more disastrous it will be when it happens.

Worldwide birth rates are declining slightly on average, but vary greatly between regions. In developed countries, they are sometimes at or below replacement levels, but in developing countries they are usually significantly higher. This can be seen from the graph of total fertility rates on the following page.



Borivali Railway Station, Mumbai

Current population growth varies widely by region, being high in Africa and parts of Asia and lower in Europe and Japan, with the Americas somewhere in

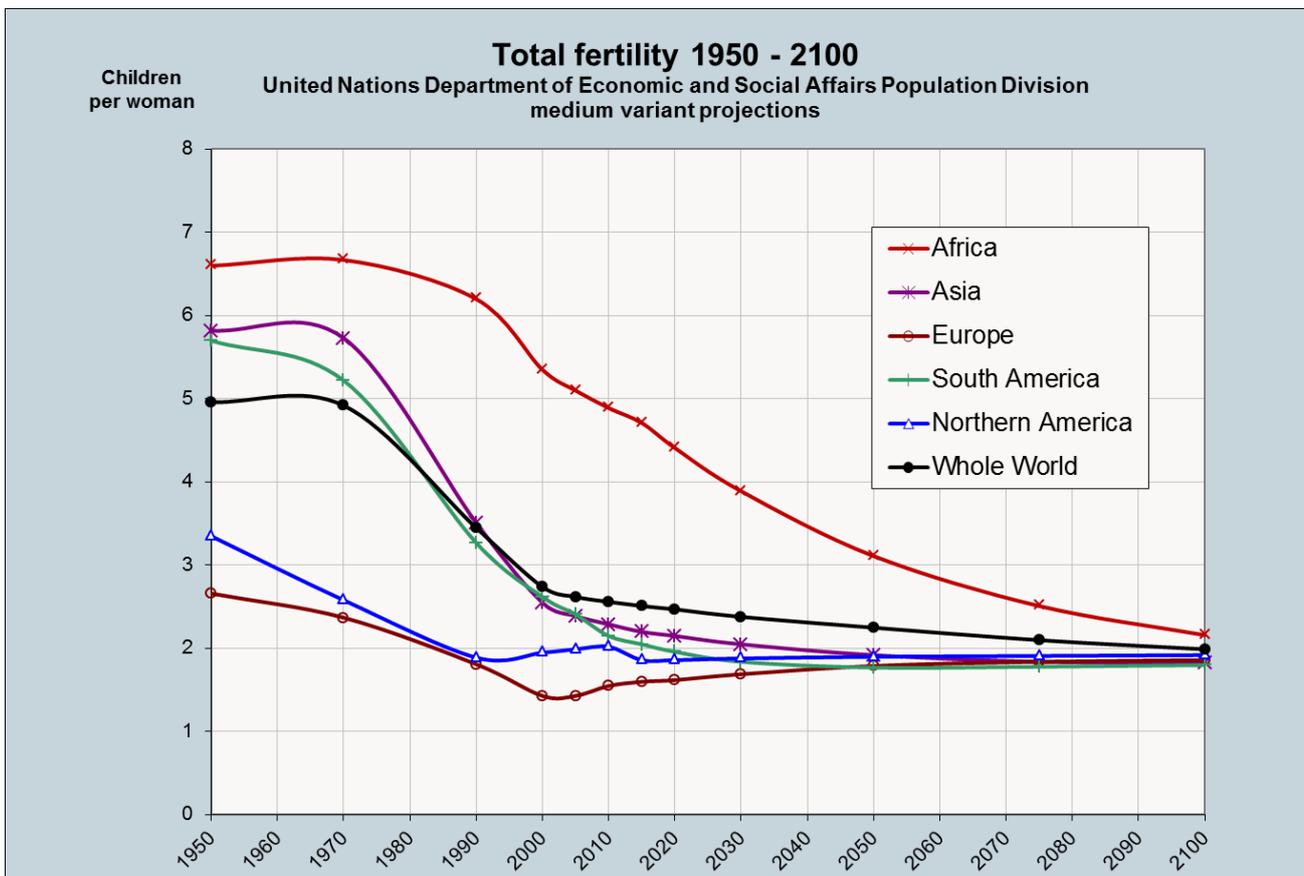
between. Some key figures are highlighted below (more can be obtained from the UN website):²

- The world population is currently growing by more than 80 million per year.
- World average fertility during the 2010–2015 period was 2.51 children per woman; this had almost halved from the 1950–1955 level of nearly five children per woman.
- The medium variant UN population projection is for average fertility to fall further, to around 2.25 in 2050 — but by then the total population is expected to be around 9.7 billion. Despite birth rates falling in many developing countries, they are expected to remain above replacement levels for a considerable time in many regions.
- Almost all growth will take place in the less-developed regions: today’s 6.1 billion population in underdeveloped countries is expected to increase to 8.4 billion in 2050. By contrast, the population of the more developed regions will remain broadly unchanged, at around 1.3 billion.
- There are some exceptions: for example, the population of the United States is expected to increase by 21 per cent from 322 million in 2015 to 389 million in 2050.
- The total population of Northern America is projected to increase from 358 to 433 million over the same period.
- Global life expectancy at birth is estimated to have risen from 46 years in 1950–1955 to 72 years in 2015–2020; it is expected to reach 77 years in 2045–2050. In the more developed regions, the projected increase is from 79 years today to 84 years by mid-century. Among the least developed countries, life expectancy is expected to increase from around 64 years in 2010–15 to 72 years in 2045–2050.
- During the period 2015–2050, the net number of international migrants to more developed regions is projected to be nearly 81 million. Because of lower birth rates in the more developed regions,

a significant proportion of their population growth will be due to international migration.

- In several developed countries population is already falling, or would be falling without net inward migration.
- By 2050, in the UN medium variant projection, India will have 1.7 billion people, China 1.3 billion, Nigeria 399 million, the United States 389 million, Indonesia 322 million, Pakistan 310 million, Brazil

238 million, Bangladesh 202 million, Democratic Republic of the Congo 195 million, Ethiopia 188 million, Mexico 164 million, Egypt 151 million, Philippines 148 million, Tanzania 137 million, the Russian Federation 129 million, Vietnam 113 million, Japan 107 million, Uganda 102 million, Turkey 96 million, Kenya 96 million, Iran 92 million, and the United Kingdom 75 million.



References

Accessed March 2016

¹ http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2015_Volume-I_Comprehensive-Tables.pdf
² http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2015_Volume-II-Demographic-Profiles.pdf