

There are of course sharp differences between regions, and between individual countries within regions; moreover, the accuracy of detailed country statistics is often less than that for the world as a whole, since on the global level, as demographers engagingly confess, errors tend to cancel each other out.

Mid-1991 figures¹ show the remarkable extent of these differences.

Africa has much the highest annual growth rate (3%) and fertility rate (6.1). Such a growth rate for an entire continent is unprecedented in the history of humanity, and there is no clear indication that it has yet started to fall. But the range is wide, between, for example, Rwanda (growth 3.4%, fertility an astounding 8.1) and Mauritius (growth 1.4%, fertility 2.0). Significantly, by 2025 Nigeria's population, now between 108 and 122 million, may be 280 to 305 million -- more than all of Northern and Western Europe. The crucial factor for the future is how fast Africa's fertility rate will fall to the replacement level. A mere 25 years delay in achieving this -- from 2025 to 2050 -- will mean a difference of 1.5 billion in Africa's total population by the year 2100.

The **Middle East** is next, with a growth rate of 2.7% and fertility rate of 4.9. Its population, now 134 million, may reach 223 million by 2025. Jordan tops the list of countries with a growth rate of 4.1%, and a fertility rate of 7.1. The growth rate is even higher in Gaza (4.4%), and almost as high in the West Bank (3.9%). Syria, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia follow close behind. Iraq is at 2.7% and 6.4. Israel, predictably, is near the bottom with 1.6% and 3.0.

South Asia, at 2.2% and 4.4, includes populous countries such as Pakistan (almost no recent change at 3.0% and 6.6), Iran (ditto, at 3.3% and 6.2), Bangladesh (2.4% and 4.9), where most of Canada's bilateral population assistance is concentrated, and above all India. The latter's growth rate, at 2.11%, is down from the 2.22% of a decade earlier, and its fertility is now "only" 3.9. But its total population, variously estimated at 843 to 859 million, may be 1,365 million by 2025, and may overtake that of China by 2045.

Latin America and the Caribbean has an overall growth rate of 2.1% and fertility of 3.5, but some large countries of South America, notably Argentina and Brazil, and most of the Caribbean except Haïti are well below this. Mexico, at 2.3% and 3.8 is a little above average for the area, but believed by U.S. government experts to be set for decline to replacement level before too long. Its population will nevertheless double before leveling off. The region as a whole will increase from 451 million now to perhaps 740 million in 2025.

Southeast Asia, at 1.9% and 3.4, includes population control success stories such as those of Indonesia and Thailand², and large countries where less change has occurred, notably Philippines and Vietnam.