

Age Structure

Among the world's children, i.e. those under 15, 17 out of 20 live in developing countries. The proportion is highest in regions where fertility is highest, e.g. in Africa, where 45% are children. Of less humanitarian but greater political significance is the proportion of those aged 15-24 in developing countries (19-20%), because of the attention which many governments feel they must pay to this restless group, particularly in the cities, to prevent their own overthrow. In contrast, the developed countries all have an ageing population, with a decline in the proportion of those of working age.

Basic Theory of Rapid Population Growth

While population growth has many causes, the basic phenomenon is commonly described in terms of the "demographic transition", i.e. the occurrence of a decisive shift from the high levels of both infant mortality and of fertility generally prevailing in pre-industrial societies. It was the decline in infant mortality in developing countries, particularly since 1950, unaccompanied by any significant decline in fertility, that began the explosive growth in world population since that time. The start of fertility decline, often quite rapid at first, slows the overall growth rate, except as offset by continuing decline in infant mortality. Eventually (an eloquently vague word), fertility rates should level off at or near replacement level, mortality will also cease to decline, and a stable population will be achieved. However fertility rates may fall further, as they have in most of the developed world, or even turn up again to a minor extent, as has happened in a few countries.⁵ Total stability of population, either in the world or in individual countries, may never be achieved, but expansion cannot be infinite, and at some point, overall growth is bound to cease. As indicated by the example of Africa cited above, the fundamental question is when, and at what level.

Population Growth and Migration

World population growth as such does not yet impinge directly on the consciousness of the public in developed countries such as Canada. There is, however, growing awareness of something closely, though indirectly and incompletely, linked with population growth -- namely, the massive and growing migration pressure from much of the developing world. These two major world phenomena must be kept in mind together in any attempt to understand and deal with either of them.

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