

China, because of its immense population, weighs heavily in the world balance; its growth rate has come down to 1.4% and its fertility rate to 2.3, but there are indications that further decreases are stalling. Its population of 1.13 to 1.15 billion may approach 1.6 billion by 2025.

The ex-USSR³ is not far above Western industrialised countries, at 0.8% and 2.3. These rates would be lower but for the Asiatic Republics; Tajikistan, for example, has one of the highest rates in the world.

North America follows close behind, at 0.8% and 2.0 (Canada at 0.78% and 1.86), as does Japan (0.3% and 1.5).⁴

And at the bottom is Europe, East and West, at 0.2% and 1.7, with Germany, Hungary and soon Denmark in actual population decline, and the continent as a whole likely to follow within about 20 years. Albanians, both in Albania and Kosovo, are an exception, with a fertility rate of 3.0. Another exception, even more important for Europe, but counted statistically in Asia, is Turkey (2.2% and 3.6). Its population may almost double by 2025.

Trends within Populations

Urbanisation

Urban populations are relatively much larger in developed countries (73%) than developing countries (34%), but have been growing much faster in the latter (4.4-4.5% per year). By 2025 61% of the population of developing countries will be urban.

Urban growth is fed by rural migration as much or more as by natural increase. By 2015 rural populations in the majority of developing countries may begin to decline in absolute terms, as they have in Europe and in East Asia for a considerable period, and as is beginning to happen in South America. As in so much else, Africa will be an exception; it will add 260 million to its rural areas by 2025, while its cities will grow even faster.

A prominent feature is the rapid growth of "megacities", huge urban agglomerations. The world now has 34 cities of over 5 million people, 23 of them in developing countries. By 1990, Mexico City, with 20.2 million inhabitants, had become the largest city in the world, with Tokyo-Yokohama (18.1 m.), São Paulo (17.4 m.) and New York (16.2 m.) as runners up. The megacities in developing countries have higher growth rates; their appalling social problems are well known.