

# Population growth

## The facts behind the figures



The United Nations Population Fund designated 31 October 2011 as the day on which the world's population hit seven billion. In fact, no one knows the exact date of the next population milestone. Many countries do not conduct regular censuses and figures are incomplete. The United States Census Bureau, in contrast to the UN, estimated that the global population reached seven billion in March 2012.

But there is general agreement that the world's population has been growing faster than ever before. It took humanity until around 1800 to reach its first billion, and since the second half of the twentieth century, numbers have grown rapidly. In the last fifty years, the global population has more than doubled, reaching six billion in 2000. It has taken only a dozen years to add another billion to reach the recent milestone of seven billion<sup>1</sup>.

On current rates of population growth around 380,000 babies are born every day, so there could be as many as 400,000 claimants to the title of the world's seven billionth person<sup>2</sup>.

The UN chose a baby in the Philippines to symbolically represent the seven billionth arrival. Danica May Camacho was born in a Manila hospital just before midnight on 30 October. Government and UN officials used the publicity to highlight the country's population-related problems. The Philippines has the highest rate of childbirth in Asia, and teenage pregnancies are common.

Later in the day, the children's organisation Plan India welcomed a new-born girl in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh as the seven billionth child. The choice was the result of a decision to highlight the problem of India's 'missing girls'. Sex-selective abortions and female infanticide are widespread in a society which places greater value on boys than girls. With 111 boys for every 100 girls, Uttar Pradesh has one of the highest rates of 'missing girls' in India. However, where there is no discrimination against girls, 105 boys per 100 girls is regarded as normal.

Experts use population milestones to highlight the challenges facing people in many parts of the world. For instance, the lack of adequate food and clean drinking water, insecurity and conflict.

Most of the population growth is taking place in countries with high birth-rates, with the majority in African countries. The populations of both India and China now exceed one billion<sup>3</sup>.

Future estimates suggest that the world's population will reach eight billion by 2025, exceeding nine billion by 2050 and ten billion by 2100<sup>3</sup>.

But there is also general agreement that global population growth will continue to slow over the next 50 years because fertility has declined almost everywhere except sub-Saharan Africa. Having peaked at over 2 per cent a year in the 1960s, growth is currently around 1 per cent a year. It is projected to decline to below 0.1 per cent before 2100.

The projections vary according to the anticipated rate of fertility, which fluctuates over time. High fertility would result in a global population of nearly 16 billion by 2100, while low fertility would see a fall in the population of the same year to just over six billion<sup>3</sup>.

The further into the future experts look, the wider the gap between projections based on different fertility rates, and the less certain the estimates.

<sup>1</sup> The ESRC Research Centre for Population Change, [cpc.geodata.soton.ac.uk/resources/downloads/PBoyle\\_7billion\\_31\\_Oct\\_2011.pdf](http://cpc.geodata.soton.ac.uk/resources/downloads/PBoyle_7billion_31_Oct_2011.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Population Reference Bureau estimates 382,351, [www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2011/world-population-data-sheet/data-sheet.aspx](http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2011/world-population-data-sheet/data-sheet.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> The ESRC Research Centre for Population Change, [cpc.geodata.soton.ac.uk/resources/downloads/PBoyle\\_7billion\\_31\\_Oct\\_2011.pdf](http://cpc.geodata.soton.ac.uk/resources/downloads/PBoyle_7billion_31_Oct_2011.pdf)