



The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population

NEWS LETTER

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“World Population Prospects: Have their continuous upward revisions ended?”

1. The United Nations 2015 and 2017 Revisions of World Population Prospects

Our News Letter No. 54 from February this year featured a report entitled “World population is projected to reach 11.2 billion by 2100”, based on the United Nations 2015 Revision of World Population Prospects. With the recent release of the 2017 Revision, on July 31 the Japanese Council on Population / Second Akashi Research Group meeting for FY2017 was held at JOICFP, at which Dr. Makoto Atoh gave a presentation on “How Should We Interpret the United Nations 2017 Revision of World Population Prospects?” Dr. Atoh is a Director Emeritus of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (IPSS), Executive Director of Japanese Council on Population, and a member of the Board of the Councilors of APDA. His presentation provided a comprehensive analysis of current trends in world population, and can be read in detail on JOICFP’s website:

<https://www.joicfp.or.jp/jpn/2017/08/17/37739/>

As well as provide some follow-up to the report in News Letter No. 54, this e-newsletter will present some edited extracts from “World Population Prospects: Have their continuous upward revisions ended?”

Key findings:

The future prospect for the world’s population was revised upwards continually following the figure of 9 billion for 2100 given in the 2002 Revision, rising to 11.213 billion in the 2015 Revision. The reason for this rise has been the world’s success in tackling HIV/AIDS, which has led to fewer deaths and an increase in life expectancies. This success was achieved in part however by diverting money from family planning programmes. This made it less possible to deliver the level of family planning services that were actually needed, which in turn led to an increase in births resulting from unwanted pregnancies.

The world population prospect of 11.184 billion people in the year 2100 given by the 2017 Revision is little changed from that in the 2015 Revision. This is because while the prospect for Africa’s population was revised upwards, prospects for the populations of Asia and Latin America were revised downwards, in effect canceling each other out. Although this upward revision in its population prospect shows Africa’s need for reproductive health (RH) services including family planning, with the Trump Administration’s re-introduction of the Mexico City Policy (which prevents the U.S. from funding certain family planning programmes out of opposition to abortion), America’s withdrawal from international support efforts in the field of family planning brings with it the risk of serious consequences.

(Compiled by APDA)

FY2017 Japanese Council on Population / Second Akashi Research Group
 “How Should We Interpret the United Nations 2017 Revision of World Population Prospects?”
 (Extracts)

2. “World Population Prospects: Have their continuous upward revisions ended?”

(1) *Between 2002 and 2015, world population prospects were constantly revised upwards (see Table 1)*

The United Nations 1990 Revision stated that the world population would peak at 11 billion people in 2100. This figure was revised downwards in the Revisions that followed, until finally the 2002 Revision projected that a world population of 9 billion people for the year 2100 (during this period some experts held the “cessationist” view of world population growth: W. Lutz, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis). In subsequent Revisions, however, the figure was revised upwards constantly, and the last Revision in 2015 projected a population in excess of 11 billion people for 2100.

Source: Makoto Atoh, “Another World Population Explosion?” (Statistics) (June 2016)

Table 1 Revision years, projected years, and projected world population figures
 (Unit: 1 million)

Revision year	Projected year				
	1980	2000	2025	2050	2100
1980	4,432	6,119	8,195	9,513	10,185
(omitted)					
1990		6,261	8,504	10,019	11,186
1992		6,228	8,472	-	-
1994		6,158	8,294	9,833	-
1996		6,091	8,039	9,367	10,414
IIASA 1996		-	-	9,874	10,350
1998		6,055	7,824	8,909	9,459
2000		6,057	7,937	9,322	-
2002		6,071	7,851	8,919	9,064
2004		6,086	7,905	9,076	-
IIASA 2004		6,055	7,827	8,797	8,414
2006			8,011	9,191	-
2008			8,012	9,150	-
2010			8,003	9,306	10,125
2012			8,083	9,551	10,854
2015			8,142	9,725	11,213
2017			8,186	9,772	11,184

(2) *The 2017 Revision projections are almost identical to the 2015 Revision projections*

The 2017 Revision’s world population projections are almost exactly the same as those in the previous Revision. It would appear from this that the series of upward revisions in recent Revisions has by and large ended – but what does a detailed breakdown of the figures suggest?

(3) *The main reason for the upward revisions of projected world population: upward revisions of Africa’s projected population*

Africa’s projected population for 2050 in the 2017 Revision is 762 million larger than what was projected in the

1998 Revision. This figure accounts for 88% of the difference of 862 million between these two Revisions' projections for world population in 2050. The lion's share of the upward revision in world population can therefore be explained by the upward revision in Africa's projected population. The reason for the upward revision in Africa's case is that the decline in Africa's fertility levels slowed in the 2000s and 2010s and concerns about improvements in Africa's longevity were swept away.

(4) The reasons for the unexpected diminished reduction in Africa's fertility rates and improvement in longevity

The reduced slowdown in Africa's fertility rates was probably caused by a lag in the spread of family planning on that continent. Between 1990 and 2015 Africa's contraceptive prevalence rate grew from 13% to just 28%, and its unmet need for family planning was high at 28%. During this period, the focus of international donors shifted from family planning to greater AIDS prevention. The resulting rapid expansion in international financial assistance halted the increase in the number of new cases of HIV/AIDS in Africa, which steadily prevented the spread of this disease. As a result, longevity in Africa unexpectedly improved. This is thought to be the major reason for the upward revision in Africa's longevity improvement.

(5) Comparing the 2015 and 2017 Revisions

It was noted above that while the 2015 Revision's projection for Africa's population was revised upwards in the 2017 Revision, no major change was made to projected world population. This is because the upward revision of Africa's projected population was canceled out by the downward revision of Asia and Latin America's population projections. Comparing the last Revision and this latest Revision for the postulates for the movements in Africa's population, there is not much difference in the assumptions given for total fertility rates, but for the assumptions for longevity there has been a large upward revision. Accordingly the cause of the upward revision in Africa's projected population can be seen as a greater-than-expected improvement in mortality rates there (owing to the better prevention and treatment of infectious diseases).

(6) Will there be no change for the time being in projections of a continued rapid increase in Africa's population?

It is believed that no change will occur for the time being in projections of a continued rapid increase in Africa's population. Although for the time being the fall in Africa's mortality rate and improvement in its longevity are major reasons for the increase in its population, in the long term they will become major factors for containing births on the continent, and are expected to lead to a fall in Africa's fertility levels. Furthermore although Africa's total fertility rate (TFR) is falling if only moderately, it is still high, at around 5.0. This means that alongside promoting economic development in Africa, it will be prudent to strengthen support for expanding RH services there, including family planning. A source of concern for Africa's fertility rates from now on, however, is that the reactivation by the Trump Administration of the Mexico City Policy is an obstacle to any such strengthening. This decision taken by the U.S. will have a major impact on Africa's population issues, and policies will be needed to counter that.

(Compiled by APDA)