POPULATION MATTERS

How the population is changing across the world

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On a global basis, the broad consensus of population forecasts is that the world population will reach 8.5bn in 2030 and 9.7bn in 2050. After the world population increased more than 400% over the 20th Century, population growth has slowed considerably.

Currently, over 60% of the world's population live in Asia but more than half of the population growth between now and 2050 will be in Africa. In contrast, the population of Europe will decline over that period. The major factors in the projected changes are a decrease in the fertility rates - with a decrease from 2.5 to 2.2 per woman by 2050 - and longevity as, global, life expectancy is set to climb from 72.6 to 77.1.

One notable feature of the next ten years is the rapid expansion of the middle class. By 2030, it is estimated that there will be 5.3 billion middle class - 2 billion more than today.

While that may be good for the economy, it is estimated that the will be significant increase in demand for food (35%), water (40%) and energy (50%). Efforts to sustainably meet the needs and desires of a growing world population will have implications for all countries – as will failure to meet these needs.

In the UK, the population is expected to increase by about 3 million over the next 10 years, passing 70 million by 2031 and 72.5 million by 2043. Almost three quarters of he increase will be caused by net in-migration. England's population is rising faster than the other UK nations.

Across the world, and particularly in Asia and Africa, a rapidly increasing number of people are living in cities. This is set to increase from about 56% today to over 68% by 2050. 84% of the UK population already lives in urban areas. However, in the UK at least, there appears to be evidence that Covid-19 has sparked a renewed interest in rural living.

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

Global and UK population will be substantially older

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By 2030, the number of older persons - those aged 60 years or over - in the world is projected to grow by 56 per cent, from 901 million to more than 1.4 billion. Ageing is not happening uniformly across the globe and will consequently change the balance of power. Europe will be the oldest region by 2031. This will continue to raise concerns about the ability of existing fiscal systems to withstand the pressures of ageing. Ageing is not happening uniformly across the globe and will consequently change the balance of power. Europe will be the oldest region in 2031 with a median age of 44.7 years.

Office for National Statistics projections show that the balance of the UK population will be substantially different by 2040. There will be more people in all the older age groups - with the number of over 85s doubling to 3 million. At the same time, there will be fewer young children and more teenagers. The dependency ratio (pensionable age : working age) is likely to rise from just under 300:1,000 to over 350:1,000 by 2040 - with rising issues of affordability of care.

In fact, due to demographic structure a central challenge over the next two decades is that the UK, along with most other developed countries, will need to prepare for more deaths. There will be a 'tipping point' emerging and the current number of deaths of 0.5mn per year will increase by 20% over the next 20 years.

This increase in the number of older people will have a profound impact on a wide range of public services - as the number of older people with care needs is expected to rise by more than 60 per cent in the next 20 years. Many people are not saving enough and will need to work longer. Health and social care costs – already challenged - will rise.

Alongside overall ageing of the population of 18-21 year olds increases to 2030 and then reduces to 2040, with implications for the potential undergraduate student population.

FURTHER READING