

Population ageing and decline 'key focus' as UN Commission opens 50th annual session

3 April 2017 – The United Nations advisory body on issues related to population and development today kicked off its annual session, with a focus on changing population age structures and sustainable development.

“Population ageing and population decline have now become key issues for a growing number of Member States,” Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Wu Hongbo told the opening segment of the Commission on Population and Development’s [fiftieth annual session](#), which will run at UN Headquarters through 7 April.

He also noted that with global fertility at, or even below, fertility level, international migration “is becoming the main driver of population change for a number of countries.”

Noting that demographic trends and population policies have evolved over the past decades, Mr. Wu stressed the important role of the Commission.

John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said that continued success in reducing death rates, including among older persons and for deaths due to heart disease, cancer and other causes previously considered intractable, has contributed to the further ageing of the world’s population.

He said that between 2015 and 2050, the population aged 65 or older in Europe will increase from 23 to 28 per cent. In North America, the corresponding percentage will rise from 18 to 23 per cent. By 2050, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania will all have more than 18 per cent of their populations at ages 65 and above.

In ageing societies, social protection mechanisms, pension systems and health care programmes are being adjusted and strengthened. Women’s participation in the workforce is being supported more than ever before, and some countries are slowly pushing up the age of retirement.



Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s commercial hub, is considered one of the fastest growing urban centres in the region, with a population that has been growing rapidly for more than a decade. Photo: Hendri Lombard/World Bank

Meanwhile, due to a relatively slow decline in rates of fertility, many parts of Africa will retain a young population for decades to come, he said. Nevertheless, as the birth rate continues to fall due in part to continuing investments in sexual and reproductive health, there will be an opportunity

for a “demographic dividend.”

As the relatively large youth cohorts of today enter the labour force of tomorrow, they will be responsible, on average, for a smaller number of children requiring their support, while the size of the older population will still be relatively small, he said.

If this future population of workers is empowered by having access to health care, education and opportunities for employment, countries will be in a good position to reap the full benefit of the favourable demographic situation caused by the temporary bulge in the age distribution as it passes through the working ages, he added.

In a statement delivered by his Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres, who said that progress in providing access to education and to sexual and reproductive health-care services, especially for girls and women, has improved the lives of women and children, and has led to falling birth rates in many countries.

“When this trend is accompanied by investments in human capital, especially for youth, a demographic dividend can result, accelerating a country’s economic growth,” he said.

That dividend can be further enhanced with increased labour force participation by women, who must be empowered and afforded the same education and employment opportunities as men, Mr. Guterres said, stressing that men also must do their part, by sharing in household work and caregiving responsibilities.

The former head of the UN refugee agency said that international migration can also help address the challenges of population ageing, by adding workers to the population and reducing the average age, encouraging all governments to facilitate migration that is safe, orderly and regular.

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Today’s opening session also featured a keynote address by EliyaZulu, Executive Director of the African Institute for Development Policy in Nairobi, on the topic of “Changing age structures and sustainable development in youthful societies.

In 2018, the General Assembly will convene an intergovernmental conference on international migration for adopting a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. The Commission on Population and Development may choose as its theme for its session in 2018 “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration.”