

**Projections and Relevant Effects of  
Demographic Implications, Changes, and  
Trends  
(PREDICT)**

**Executive Summary  
Interim Report Two  
Demographic Trends**

## **Note on the Report**

The second interim report has been authored by the University of Bologna Research Team.

*Director of Research:* Sonia Lucarelli;

*Researchers:* Michela Ceccorulli, Enrico Fassi, Veronica Lenzi, Francesco Niccolò Moro, Matteo Villa;

*Scientific advisors:* Filippo Andreatta, Eugenia Baroncelli, Giancarlo Gasperoni, Giampiero Giacomello, Angelo Panebianco, Lorenzo Zambenardi;

*Reviewers by other partner institutions:* Emanuele Castelli, Tyson Chatagnier, George Christou, Erik Jones, Kerim Can Kavakli;

*External reviewers:* Federico Casprini, Gregory Copley, Massimo Livi Bacci, Christine MacNulty, Silvana Salvini.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates the main population change projected by 2035, focusing on key demographic dimensions and on their expected trends. Key findings include:

- World population is projected to increase to 8.7 billion in 2035, that is 1.6 billion people more than in 2013. Most of this increase (1.5 billion) will occur in the less developed areas of the world. Population growth rate, however, will slow down nearly everywhere, and more than 40 countries (included Russia) will experience an overall decline in population.
- Population projections are contingent on assumptions made about fertility. At the global level, total fertility is projected to decrease by 2035 (from 2.53 to 2.30 children per woman). Fertility decline will take place independently of ethnic or religious differences. However, fertility levels in Africa will be on average more than one child higher than in Asia or Latin America. Afghanistan, Angola, DRC, Nigeria and Somalia will be among the countries with the highest fertility rates.
- Changes in population composition by 2035 will be mostly related to age composition, with an overall trend towards the increase of the proportion of older people and the reduction of the younger (ageing). In particular, by 2035, people aged 60 or more are expected to account for 30% of the population in developed regions, 16% in the less developed regions, and 7.5% in the least developed countries. Consequently, the more developed regions will also experience a decline in the share of their working age populations.
- Worldwide, no major changes are projected in the ethnic composition of population by 2035, although the lack of reliable data for this type of indicator does not allow confident estimates. Changes in ethnicity are most likely to be confined to the developed world, as a consequence of immigration. Concerning religion, the overall trend is that of an increase of 35% in the Muslim population by 2035, though the rate of growth is expected to slow in the subsequent two decades.
- At the global level, life expectancy at birth is expected to increase to 74.5 years (from 69 now), although discrepancies will persist among different geographical areas. In particular, this trend will materialize only if the diffusion of HIV and other diseases is lowered in the least developed countries.
- Urbanization is a prominent trend in many demographic forecasts. Indeed, the global increase in population projected through 2035 will be almost entirely absorbed by cities. By 2035, urban population will have surpassed rural population in all regions, while Asia and Africa will account for almost 78% of the world urban population.
- Migration constitutes a major determinant of population change impacting not only population growth but also population composition, fertility rates, life expectancy

and urbanization dynamics. Although highly unpredictable, the ongoing mutation in migration trajectories, with the increase in “South-South” flows, will significantly affect both developing and developed countries.

- The review of recent literature sheds light on several different views and alternative projections about each of the demographic dimensions examined, challenging UN data and mainstream analyses. Thus, although global population estimates for 2035 are very consistent, there can be significant variations at the country level (the USCB, for example, predicts a Chinese population with 70 million fewer people than the UN prediction), while even the same data could lead to different readings (such as of the so-called ‘demographic bomb’). Given its fundamental role, assumptions concerning fertility are widely debated, as are its consequences in terms of population composition. Although a general consensus exists about the trend in ageing, its meaning and impact are essentially contested as is its relationship with life expectancy and economic growth. Urbanization has also attracted significant attention within the literature, especially in terms of its inherent economic opportunities and risks. Finally, given the dependence of migration on push and pull factors, effective flows of migrants and refugees may well deviate from expected UN figures and alternative projections sometimes depict a world characterized by substantially higher migration flows.
- The analysis shows how each demographic variable – and its consequent projections – not only is subject to different interpretations and estimates, but could also interact in many ways with other demographic variables, as well as with variables and trends in other sectors. In order to highlight the complex causal mechanisms that underlie population change, this report suggests a focus on trends in the economy, energy, technology, health, the environment and politics to understand how these factors could influence or interact with demographic indicators, possibly challenging some of the trends identified in this report.