

# WHY POPULATION MATTERS TO **MIGRATION** **AND URBANIZATION**



People are moving from place to place more than ever before. Rates of international migration are increasing, and more than half of the world's population now lives in cities.<sup>1</sup> Many personal, economic, and environmental factors drive migration, and the pressures of population growth often contribute to individuals' decisions to move. Improving the status of women through increased access to reproductive health care in rural and urban areas can affect migration and urbanization trends by reducing demand for public services and increasing employment and economic opportunities.

## The State of Migration and Urbanization

In 2010, more than 200 million people—about 3 percent of the world's population—lived in a country different from the one in which they were born, and internal migration within countries continues at high levels.<sup>2</sup> International migrants, who may move permanently or temporarily to another country, are equally likely to be men or women.<sup>3</sup> About 10 percent of the population of developed countries is comprised of international migrants, who commonly migrate for economic reasons. Less than 10 percent of international migrants are refugees from conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly half of those who move from developing countries reside in other developing countries, usually one that shares a border.<sup>5</sup> Australia/New Zealand and other Pacific countries, North America and Western Europe have the greatest share of international migrants within their populations, while Polynesia and Central America see the greatest share of their residents migrate abroad.<sup>6</sup> Migration is often equated with international movement, but migration within countries, primarily from rural to urban areas, accounts for

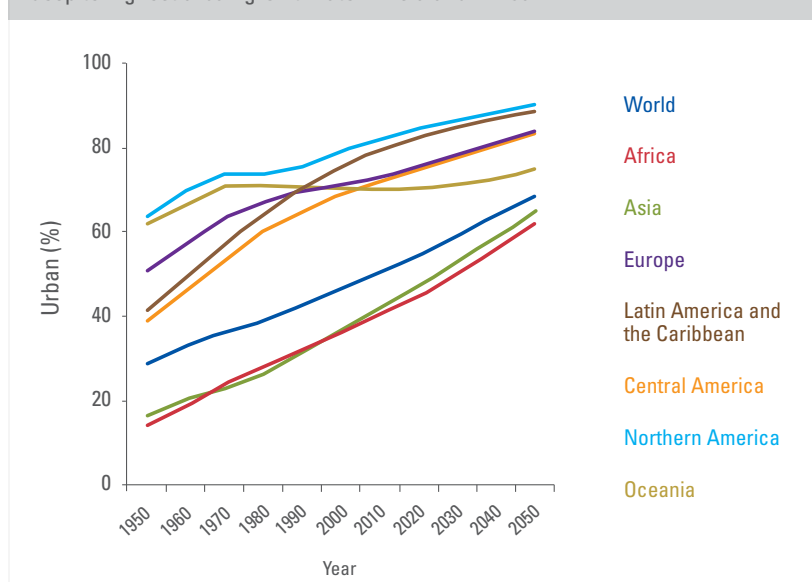
a much greater share of the movement within human populations than international migration.

As of 2009, more than half of the world's population lived in urban areas. Urbanization is commonly associated with mega-cities (cities with over 10 million inhabitants), but the majority

of the world's urban population lives in cities with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

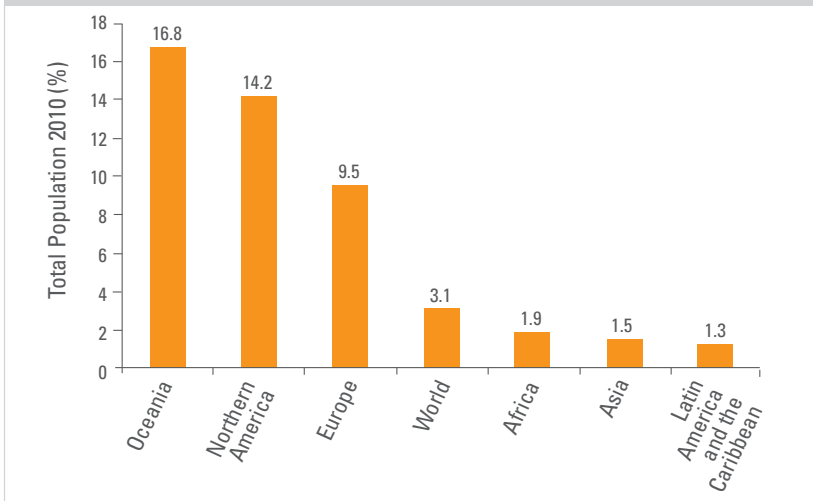
The United Nations Population Division projects that the global urban population will almost double from 3.5 to 6.3 billion by 2050 (Figure 1), assuming that fertility rates decline

**FIGURE 1: Urbanization Continues Across All Regions**  
North America and Latin America projected to remain most urbanized despite highest urban growth rate in Asia and Africa



Source: United Nations Population Division. 2010. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision*. New York: UN Population Division.

**FIGURE 2: Oceania, Northern America and Europe Have Highest Share of International Migrants**



Source: United Nations Population Division. 2009. *International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision*. New York: UN Population Division.

in developing countries. This increase in the number of people living in cities would be equal to the current populations of China, India and the United States combined. Most of this urban growth will take place in Asia and Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Urban populations generally benefit from higher incomes and better access to health care services compared with rural areas, but disparities remain between the rich and poor within cities. Informal settlements and slums—which house more than 1 billion of the world’s urban dwellers—are often not equipped with basic sanitation systems. Across sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of the urban population lives in areas where access to basic infrastructure, such as private toilets, is limited.<sup>9</sup> One study found that the child mortality rate in Nairobi’s slums was far higher than the rural child mortality rate.<sup>10</sup>

### Links between Population and International Migration

Given the significant number of people moving to new countries in some regions, migration will shape future demographic trends (Figure 2). By 2050, between 15 and 36 percent of the population of various countries in Western Europe is projected to be of “foreign origin.”<sup>11</sup> International migration impacts a receiving country’s

age structure in three ways: through the numerical size of the immigrant population, the concentration of immigrants among the working-age adult population, and the fertility rate among immigrants.

The movement of people from developing to developed countries can lessen the economic effects of population aging in low-fertility countries. As large numbers of a country’s citizens move into retirement, the labor force shrinks, putting a strain on the economy. Migrants are usually of working age and fill employment gaps in labor sectors. If all international migration ended immediately, the working-age population of developed countries would decline by more than 20 percent between 2005 and 2050.<sup>12</sup> Migration, however, is unlikely to reach the vast scale needed to completely offset the demographic effects of lower fertility rates.

International migration also alters a country’s age structure because migrant women often have higher fertility rates than women in the receiving countries. Migrants’ fertility rates are much more related to their socioeconomic status or the norms and values of their country of origin than to factors such as religion. A review of surveys from 1991 through 2005 found that fertility rates among immigrant women in Europe ranged

from 17 to 52 percent higher than those of native-born women. However, this effect diminishes over time: Within as few as 10 years, the average number of children among most groups of immigrants from higher-fertility countries declines to the level of their peers in the receiving country.<sup>13</sup>

Migration also has economic effects on developing countries, particularly through remittances, or money sent from international migrants to their families at home. In 2009, a total of \$316 billion in remittances was sent to developing regions; in nine countries, these sums exceeded one-fifth of national gross domestic product.<sup>14</sup> In many countries, remittances are very effective at reducing poverty in the families of those who have migrated, and, to a lesser degree, in their surrounding communities.<sup>15</sup> Although the extended absence of migrants challenges families and communities, migration can also have positive social benefits, especially for girls. In rural Pakistan, where girls are generally underrepresented in school enrollment rates, girls from migrant households are healthier, more likely to stay in school, and are less likely to be sent to work.<sup>16</sup>

### Links between Population and Urbanization

As populations progress through the demographic transition—the change over time from higher to lower mortality and fertility rates—fertility tends to decline earlier and at a more rapid pace in urban areas. Demographic household surveys conducted in sub-Saharan Africa since 2000 show that urban fertility rates are lower than those in rural areas by at least one child per woman in 22 of 23 countries, as Figure 3 shows for five countries in East Africa.<sup>17</sup> This disparity in fertility between urban and rural areas tends to diminish as countries progress to lower overall fertility rates.<sup>18</sup> In cities, a number of factors contribute to lower fertility rates. These include higher costs of raising children, a more educated population, higher age at marriage and greater access to contraception.<sup>19</sup>

Urban fertility rates, while lower than in rural areas, are still high enough to generate population growth. In many cities, average fertility rates still exceed the replacement level (approximately 2.1 children per woman). The growth of cities large and small is often thought to be a result of migration. But more urban population growth is due to natural increase from high birth rates than to urbanization itself.<sup>20</sup>

### Forced Migration

Millions of people have been displaced by natural disasters and conflict. As climate change redraws coastlines and constrains natural resources, more people will be forced to move, often to urban areas. Political turmoil and conflicts also displace many people from their homes each year. Worldwide, there are over 40 million refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers.<sup>21</sup>

### THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Although individual well-being and economic opportunity are often driving forces for migration, environmental factors also play an underlying role. In some cases, such as natural

disasters, the environment is a direct cause of migration; in others, such as declining availability or quality of land for farming, it is one of many contributing factors. Those who migrate for environmentally-induced reasons are more likely to move to an urban location in their own country than to cross borders.<sup>22</sup>

The impacts of climate change are likely to have an even greater influence on migration. Diminished agricultural capacity, increased frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, and rise in sea level are likely to contribute to migrants' decisions to move.<sup>23</sup> Many adverse effects of climate change will be felt among people in the countries and regions least equipped to adapt. These include arid areas of sub-Saharan Africa, and flood-prone, low elevation coastal zones like Bangladesh—areas that also have high rates of population growth.<sup>24</sup>

By one projection, 200 million people could be displaced by flooding, droughts, changing weather patterns and other impacts of climate change.<sup>25</sup> This environmental displacement would result in an estimated one in 45 people worldwide being displaced by climate change.<sup>26</sup>

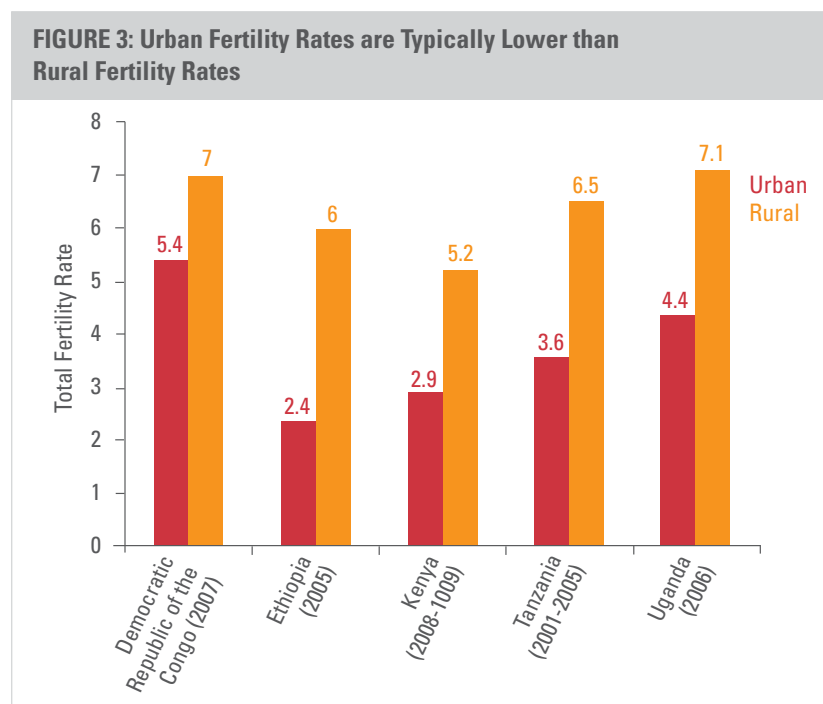
### CONFLICT

Conflicts and violence around the world also continue to displace people, moving them into temporary displacement or refugee camps, or to urban slums where access to quality reproductive health services is limited. In Africa, almost half of all countries are experiencing current or recent conflict.<sup>27</sup> Forced migration due to conflict has a negative impact on developing economies and the government's ability to provide lifesaving services. Today, the average length of displacement from conflict for refugees is 17 years.<sup>28</sup>

### Policy Considerations

Population growth and high fertility rates in rural and urban areas will have significant impacts on migration, economic development and the environment. Migration and urbanization trends should be considered in plans to address workforce shortages in countries that send and receive large numbers of internal and international migrants. As urbanization continues, the infrastructure for health and other social services in cities needs to improve, and resources should be used more efficiently to meet the needs of growing populations.

Improving access to family planning and reproductive health care services in both rural and urban areas can help address some of factors that contribute to migration and urbanization, as well as benefit individuals, communities and the environment. Urbanization combined with high fertility rates and low contraceptive use contributes to rapid population growth. In both urban and rural settings, marginalized populations lack access to reproductive health information and services. Lack of access is often compounded for those who live in rural areas far from the nearest health care facility, or who lack legal recognition in urban slums without local services. The needs of these marginalized populations should be taken into account when designing programs and services to address the population impacts of migration and urbanization.



Source: MEASURE DHS. Demographic and Health Surveys. Various countries, most recent year available. <http://www.measuredhs.com/countries/>. Accessed 15 December 2010.

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