1. Population

The population growth rate in Asia and the Pacific, while already lower than that of the global average, continued to slow in 2014.

The population of Asia and the Pacific reached 4.3 billion people in 2014, equivalent to 60% of the world's total. While population growth in the region is often still described as a "demographic explosion", the growth rate for Asia and the Pacific, at 0.9% in 2014, was lower than the global population growth rate (1.1%). Additionally, the population growth rate continued to slow, from 1.4% during the period 1990-2000 to 1.0% during the period 2000-2010. Yet, in absolute terms population increase remains immense, with 573.7 million people having been added to the population between 2000 and 2014.

As a result of lower fertility − the region is just at the population replacement level of 2.1 children per woman − and owing to increasing longevity, rapid population ageing has become an issue. Over the next 20 years, the elderly population (aged 65 years and older) is expected to double from its current level of 330 million people. Some countries in the region are still in the phase of having a large working-age population; this situation is considered to be a window of opportunity − a "demographic dividend" when the proportion of dependents is low − but that window may soon be closed due to continued fertility declines and population ageing. Therefore, countries need to invest in education and skill formation as well as in productive job creation to reap this "dividend". Countries also need to develop financially sustainable social and income security systems for the elderly.

Persistently low fertility rates, sometimes combined with high levels of outmigration, have led to negative population growth in some countries and areas: Niue (-2.9%), Georgia (-0.4%), Russian Federation (-0.2%) and Japan (-0.1). In some countries and areas, such as Macao, China; Hong Kong, China; and Singapore, low levels of fertility are compensated by high rates of in-migration. Some countries, such as the Russian Federation, are addressing this problem through labour in-migration, while others are adopting policies to encourage larger families.

In the region, sex-ratio imbalances in favour of males are among the highest in the world. Although the natural sex ratio at birth is 105 boys for every 100 girls,[1] the ratio for the Asia-Pacific region stands at 110, bringing the global average to 107. This regional trend is influenced largely by China and India; the sex ratio at birth in these countries has increased from fewer than 108 boys per 100 girls in 1990 to the current level of 116.8 and 111.1, respectively. The higher ratios in both countries reflect a cultural preference for boys, but in the case of China, the phenomenon may also have been influenced by the country's one-child policy.

- The region hosts the two most populous countries in the world: China with 1.4 billion people and India with 1.25 billion people.

- Even with a modest population growth rate of 0.9%, the Asia-Pacific region added more than 40 million people to its population between 2013 and 2014.

- The proportion of people in Asia and the Pacific within the most economically active age band is increasing. In 2014, about 68% or nearly 3 billion people in the region were aged between 15 and 64 years.

- East and North-East Asia counts nearly 11 elderly per hundred people, twice as much as in South and South-West Asia.

- From 1990 to 2014, the population of elderly persons (65 years and older) has nearly doubled (from 173 million to more than 330 million). During the same period, the population of children (0-14 years) declined slightly, hovering at 1 billion. By 2034, the elderly population is expected to double again and the child population to continue declining.

[1] In the absence of sex selection practices, a range of "normal" sex ratios at birth of between 103 and 108 boys per 100 girls has been observed in different economically developed countries, and among different ethnic and racial groups within a given country.