
Seven billion and counting

WORKSHEET A

If you have been following the news you will know that the world's population recently reached seven billion – probably on 31st October.

The statistics concerning human population growth are astonishing. It was only 12 years ago, in 1999, that the world's population reached six billion. In 1969 there were 3.5 billion people on the planet, which is to say our numbers have doubled in only 42 years. A century ago, in 1911, there were only 1.8 billion of us: 26% of today's total. Scientists who try to estimate the number of people *who have ever lived*, in the tens of thousands of years since our ape-like ancestors evolved into what we would recognise as human beings, usually come up with figures between 100 and 110 billion. If 100 billion were correct, we could say that 7% of all the humans ever born are alive today. As for future population growth, it seems there will probably be eight billion people by 2030 and nine billion by around 2050. After that, predictions vary: many experts think the total will rise more slowly, perhaps reaching ten billion by the end of the century; but a few believe the fast rise might continue, leading to a global population of as many as 15 billion by 2100.

There are big differences between rates of population growth around the world. The fastest rates are generally in the world's poorer countries, including those in sub-Saharan Africa, while the populations of rich countries are mostly growing much more slowly, or even shrinking in a few cases. (Germany and Japan, for example, will have smaller populations in 2050 than they do now.) This fact explains another interesting statistic: in 1900 Europe contained around 25% of the world's people, but in 2050 it will have less than 10%.

There are many reasons for fast population growth, but the most significant include medical advances and generally improved standards of living in poor countries, which mean fewer deaths from diseases or from malnutrition. Indeed, average life expectancy across the world has risen 20 years since the 1950s, from 48 to 68, and the biggest rises have been in poor countries.

Some people already talk of a crisis of overpopulation, expecting there to be wars over access to natural resources and warning that, because those resources are finite, it is impossible for seven billion people (let alone nine or ten) to have the kind of high-consumption lifestyles that people in the world's richer countries currently enjoy.

Others, however, believe the planet can accommodate another two or three billion humans without a social or environmental catastrophe.

We can only hope the optimists will be proved right.

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Here are some simple definitions for words that appear in the text on Worksheet A. Find the words they refer to and fill in the gaps.

1. **__ to _____ ng** (adjective): very surprising
2. **__ n __ c ____ t ____** (phrase): used for saying that a number is continuing to increase as time passes
3. **l _ f _ _ x ____ t __ c _** (noun): the length of time that someone is likely to live
4. **a ____ mm ____ t _** (verb): to provide enough space for something or someone
5. **c __ as _____ e** (noun): disaster
6. **c _ n ____ p _____** (noun): the process of buying or using goods, or the amount that people buy or use
7. **o _____ op _____** (noun): the situation in which there are too many people living in a place
8. **__ ll __** (verb): to be interested in the progress of someone or something, and therefore to pay attention to it
9. **c ____ u _ w ____ something** (phrasal verb): to produce or provide something
10. **__ e** (noun): large monkey
11. **r _ t _** (noun): the speed at which something happens within a particular period of time
12. **cr _____** (noun): an urgent, difficult or dangerous situation
13. **p __ d __ t ____** (noun): a statement about what you think will happen in the future
14. **s __ n _____ o _ l _ v ____** (noun): the quality of life that a person or society has, particularly because of how rich or poor they are
15. **m _ l _ u ____ t ____** (noun): the medical condition of being weak or ill because you do not have enough food to eat
16. **_____ nk** (verb): to become smaller in size
17. **n _ t ____ l _ r _ s _____** (noun): important substances (such as wood, oil, water) that exist in a country's land and sea
18. If there is only a limited number or amount of something, we can say that thing is **f __ i _ e** (adjective).
19. **s __ t ____ i __** (noun): facts expressed as numbers
20. **__ t a ____ e** (phrase): used for saying that something is even less likely to happen than another unlikely thing (for example, 'I probably can't run five kilometres, __ t a ____ e ten.')

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 2

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

1. One hundred years ago the world's population was 2.5 billion.
2. Everyone agrees about how the global population will probably grow after 2050.
3. Medical advances have had a big effect on population growth.
4. There does not seem to be a connection between a country's rate of population growth and how rich the country is.
5. Europe now has around 15% of the world's population.
6. No one believes the world's population will be above 12 billion at the end of this century.
7. There are countries in Africa with fast rates of population growth.
8. The population of the United States will grow slowly between now and 2050.
9. The world's population will probably grow by another billion between now and 2030.
10. In some poor countries there have been rises in life expectancy since the 1950s.

Exercise 3

Answer the questions below.

1. When was the world's population half of what it is now?
2. How is it possible to arrive at the conclusion that '7% of all the humans ever born are alive today'?
3. The text mentions two different predictions for what will happen to the global population after 2050: what are they?
4. Why, according to some people, is it impossible for seven billion humans to live like people in the world's richer countries currently do?
5. What is the opinion of the 'optimists'?