

How the population is changing across the world

On a global basis, the broad consensus of population forecasts is that the world population will reach 8.5bn in 2030 and 9.7bn in 2050. After the world population increased more than 400% over the 20th Century, population growth has slowed considerably.

Currently, over 60% of the world's population live in Asia but more than half of the population growth between now and 2050 will be in Africa. In contrast, the population of Europe will decline over that period. The major factors in the projected changes are a decrease in the fertility rates - with a decrease from 2.5 to 2.2 per woman by 2050 - and longevity, as global life expectancy is set to climb from 72.6 to 77.1.

One notable feature of the next ten years is the rapid expansion of the middle class. By 2030, it is estimated that there will be 5.3 billion middle class - 2 billion more than today.

While that may be good for the economy, it is estimated that there will be significant increase in demand for food (35%), water (40%) and energy (50%). Efforts to sustainably meet the needs and desires of a growing world population will have implications for all countries – as will failure to meet these needs.

In the UK, the population is expected to increase by about 3 million over the next 10 years, passing 70 million by 2031 and 72.5 million by 2043. Almost three quarters of the increase will be caused by net in-migration. England's population is rising faster than the other UK nations.

Across the world, and particularly in Asia and Africa, a rapidly increasing number of people are living in cities. This is set to increase from about 56% today to over 68% by 2050. 84% of the UK population already lives in urban areas. However, in the UK at least, there appears to be evidence that Covid-19 has sparked a renewed interest in rural living.