

# Demographic Fast Facts about Eastern and Southern 2023 Update<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

**This note summarizes demographic trends and projections in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) over the 1950 to 2100 period that may be of interest to UNICEF and partners.** This includes: (i) population growth; (ii) urbanization, slums and population density; (iii) births by teenagers and adults; (iv) child deaths; (v) the child population; (vi) the labour force; and (vii) the dependency ratio (as a measure of the demographic dividend window). The analyses are based on UNICEF's Africa Population Dynamics Tool (February 2022 version), which can be downloaded [here](#) together with a primer on the demographic dividend potential of ESA.<sup>2</sup> All calculations are based on UN DESA's [World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision](#) (medium variant estimates) and UN DESA's [World Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision](#) and reflect the 21 countries included in UNICEF's regional classification.

## Population growth

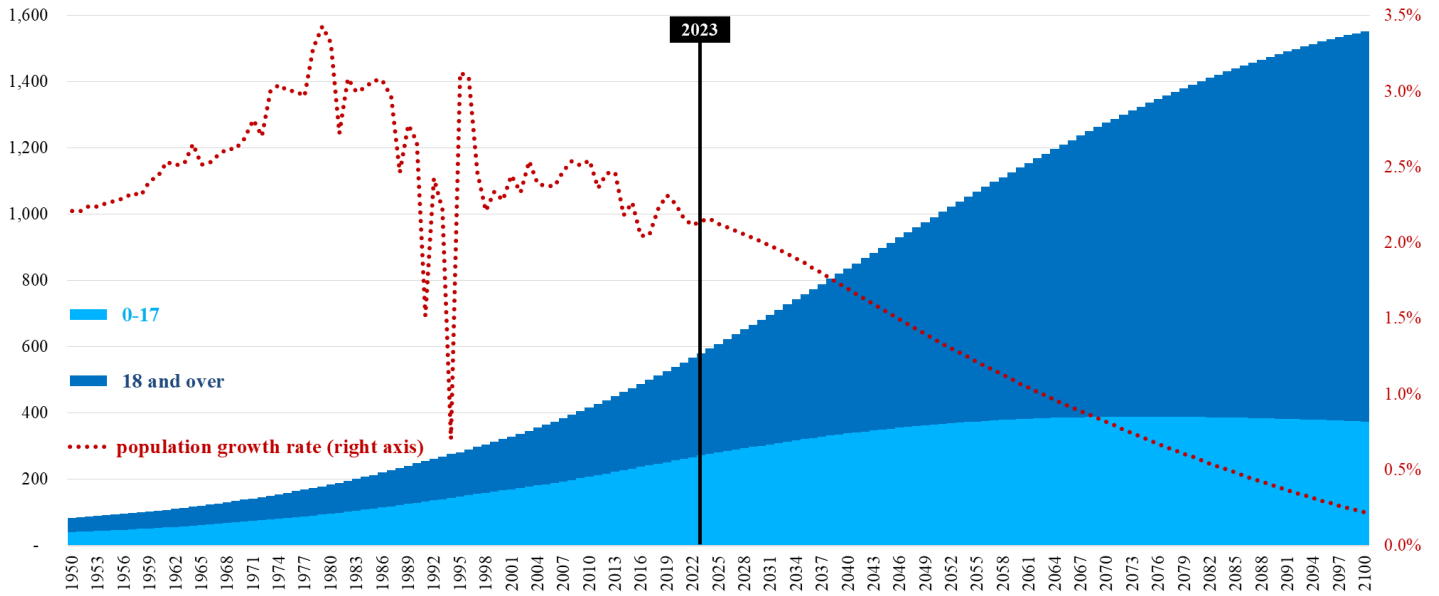
- **ESA is experiencing a demographic boom:** Home to 90 million persons in the 1950s, there are approximately 580 million persons living in the region in 2023 (Figure 1). The total population will exceed one billion around 2050 and 1.5 billion by 2090 – more than India and China today. It will take just over 35 years for the population to double.
- **Shrinking family sizes and longer lives are driving fast population growth:** While in 1950 the average woman had around seven children during her lifetime and people barely survived 40 years, today women are having less than four children and people are expected to live more than 60 years (Figure 2). By the end of the century, the fertility rate will be less than two children, on average, while life expectancy will surpass 75 years.
- **Seven of the 15 fastest-growing populations globally are in ESA:** In 2023, population growth will be 3% or higher in Angola and Somalia and between 2.7% and 2.9% in Burundi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. However, this trend is not universal, as some countries in Southern Africa are growing at less than 1%, such as Eswatini and South Africa.
- **The world is becoming increasingly African [Sub-Saharan]:** The population growth rate in ESA (2.1%) – and Sub-Saharan Africa (2.5%) more broadly – is significantly faster than in Europe (-0.1%), North America (0.6%), Asia (0.7%), Latin America (0.8%), and the Middle East and North Africa (1.5%). By the end of the century, more than one out of every three people in the world will be living in Sub-Saharan Africa, up from just 15% today (Figure 3). Most of those gains will be at the expense of shrinking populations in Asia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Matthew Cummins, Social Policy Regional Adviser, from UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO). For any questions, please contact: [mcummins@unicef.org](mailto:mcummins@unicef.org).

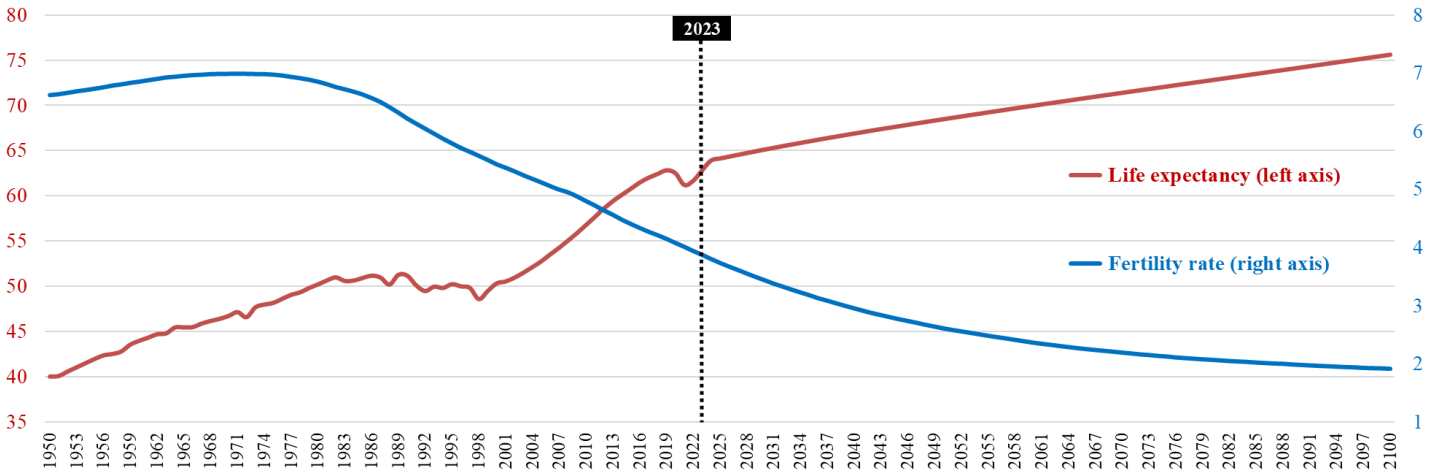
<sup>2</sup> This was published in 2019. Although the population data presented in the paper have since been updated in the World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision, the main trends and narrative remain relevant.

**Figure 1. Population projections in ESA, 1950-2100**  
(in millions of persons and annual growth rate)



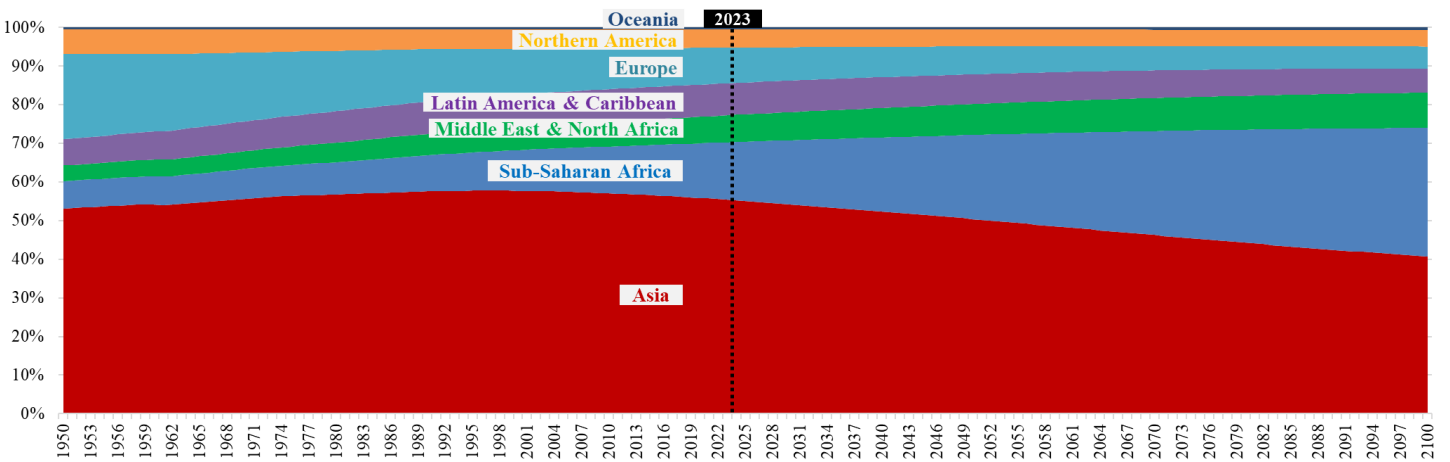
**Figure 2. Fertility rate and life expectancy projections in ESA, 1950-2100**

(in average # of children born to a woman in her lifetime and average # of years a newborn is expected live)



**Figure 3. Global population projections by regions, 1950-2100**

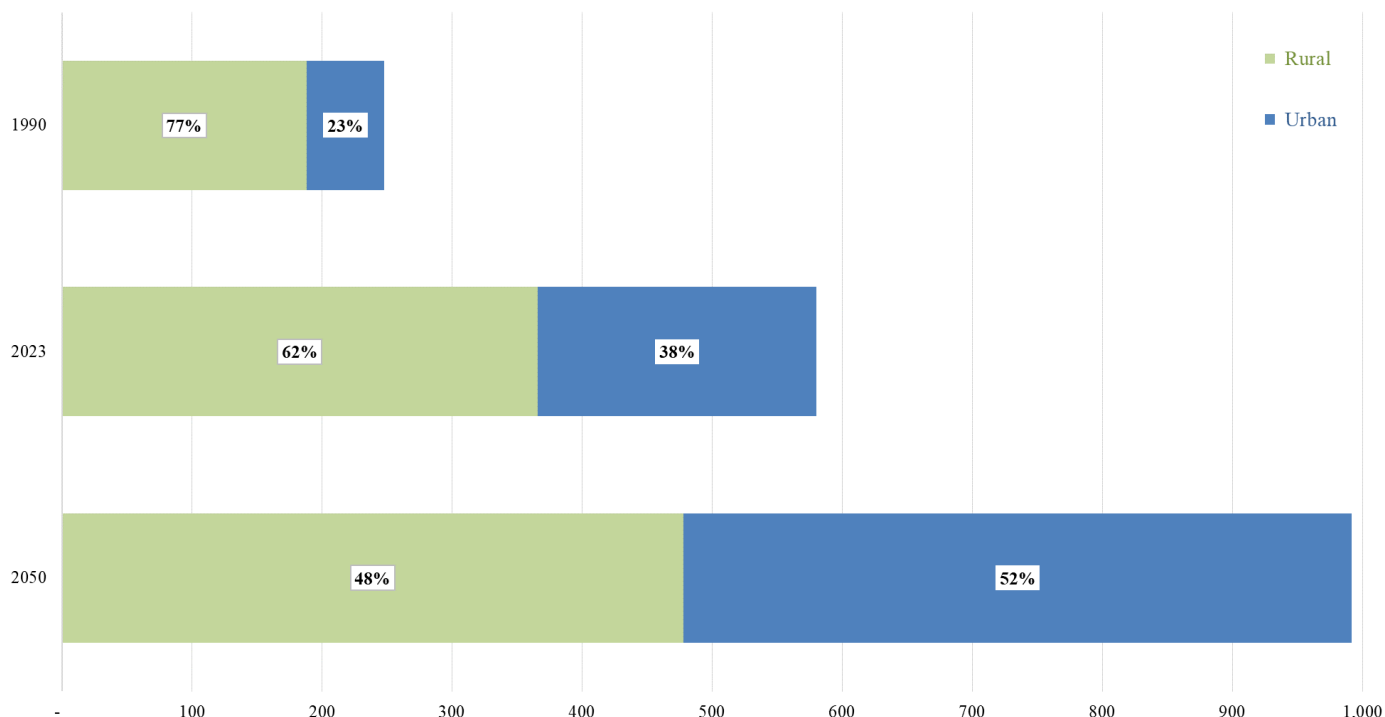
(as a % of global total)



## Urbanization, slums and population density

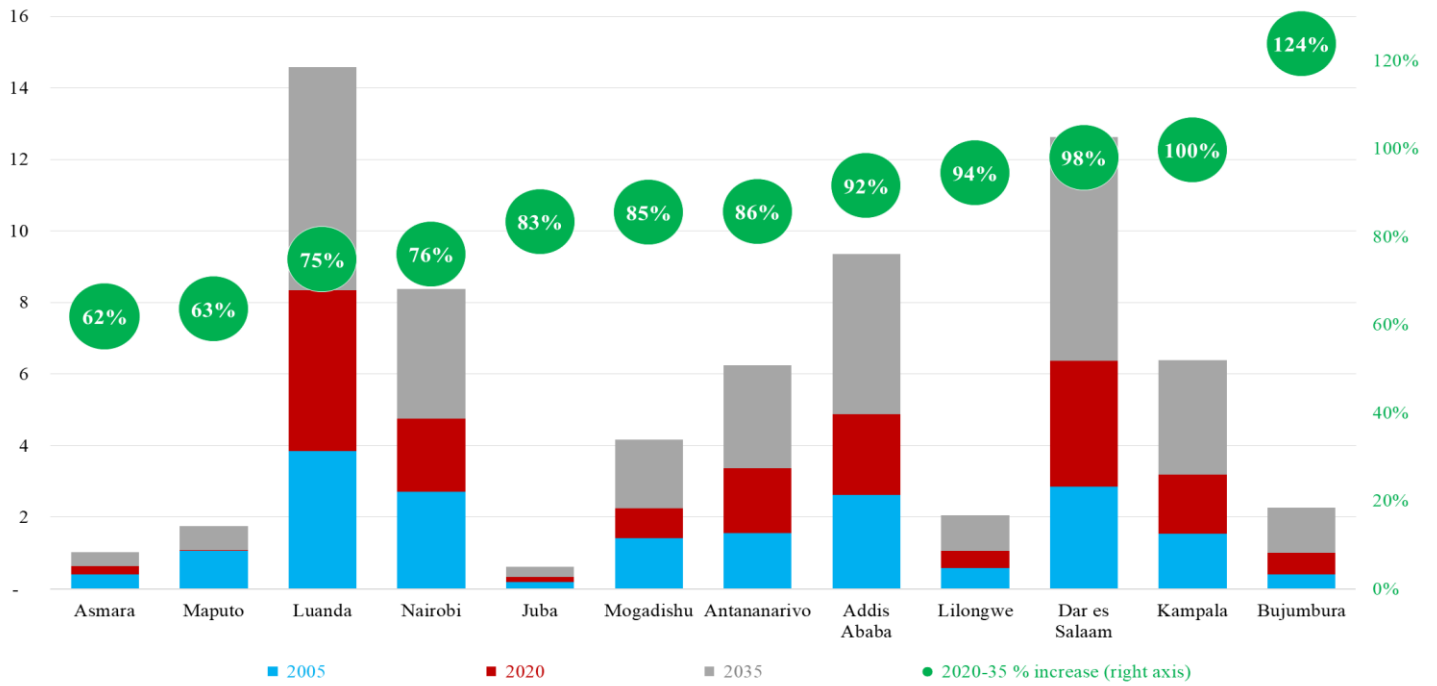
- **Urban and peri-urban locations are expanding rapidly due to births and migrants:** Today, close to two out of every five people in ESA live in an urban setting, which is up from around one out every five in 1990 (Figure 4). In just over 20 years (around 2045), there will be more people living in urban areas than in rural areas.
- **The populations of many capital and secondary cities will double by 2035:** Capitals include Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Lilongwe, while secondary cities include Dire Dawa and Mekele in Ethiopia, Quelimane and Tete in Mozambique, Hargeysa and Merca in Somalia, Blantyre in Malawi and Morogoro in Tanzania, among others (Figure 5).
- **Dar es Salaam and Luanda are the two mega cities<sup>3</sup> projected in the region by 2035:** They absorb more than 1,100 new residents every day, on average (Figure 6). At around 750/day, Addis Ababa and Nairobi are not far behind.
- **Many people are moving to slums, which house an increasing number of children:** Between 2000 and 2020, the child population residing in urban slums is estimated to have increased from 24 to 42 million (Figure 7). Despite the rising numbers over recent decades, the share of children living in these conditions has remained constant, at around 16%.
- **Fast population growth is also making ESA increasingly crowded:** In 1950, there were around 20 people living in an average square km, which is now close to 150 and will reach nearly 350 by the end of the century (Figure 8). ESA additionally houses some of the least populated areas in the world (e.g. < five persons per square km in Botswana and Namibia) as well as some of the densest (e.g. > 500 persons per square km in Burundi and Rwanda).

**Figure 4. Rural and urban population projections in ESA, 1990-2050**  
(in millions of persons and as a % of the total population)

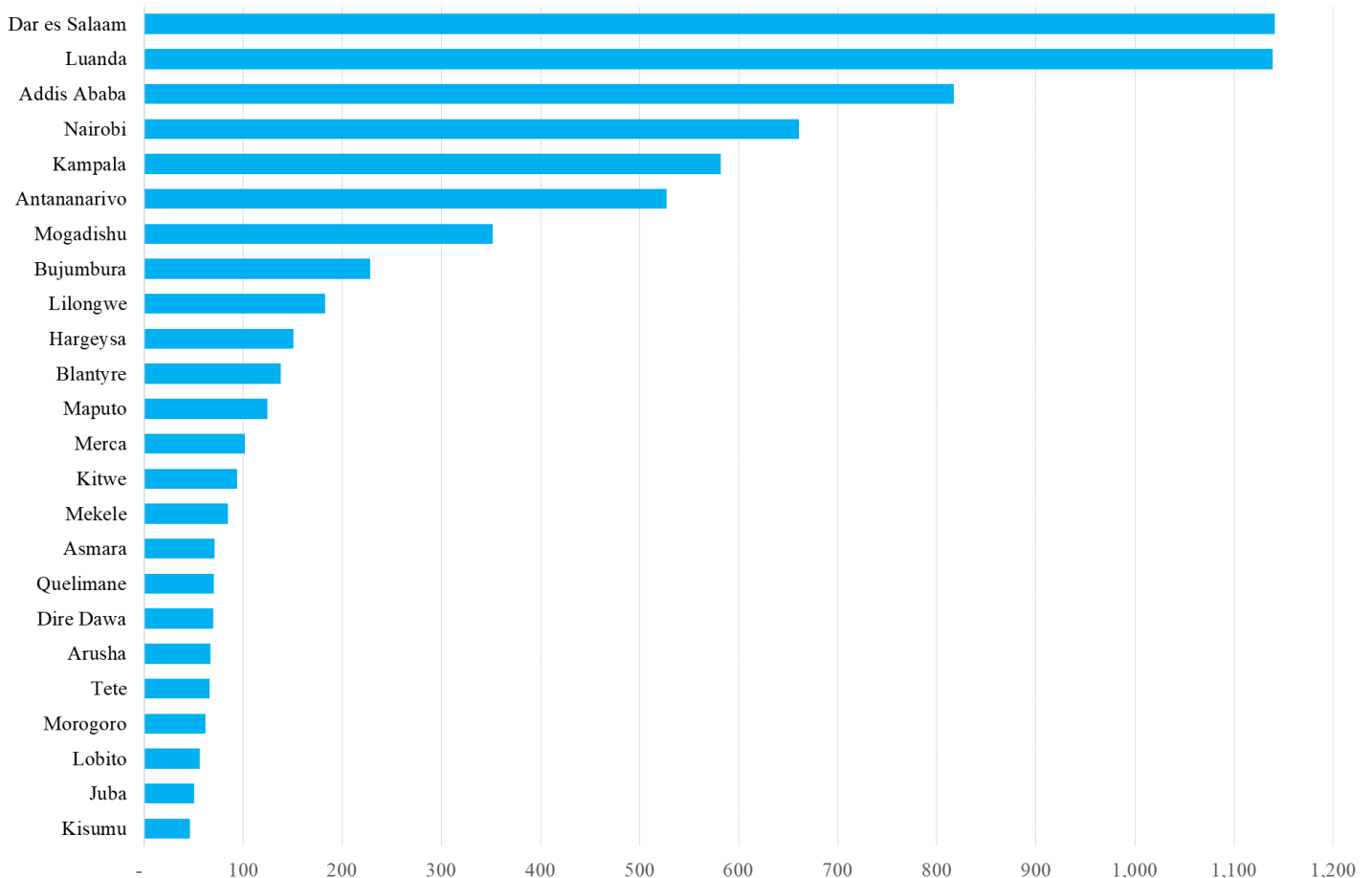


<sup>3</sup> Defined as having more than ten million inhabitants.

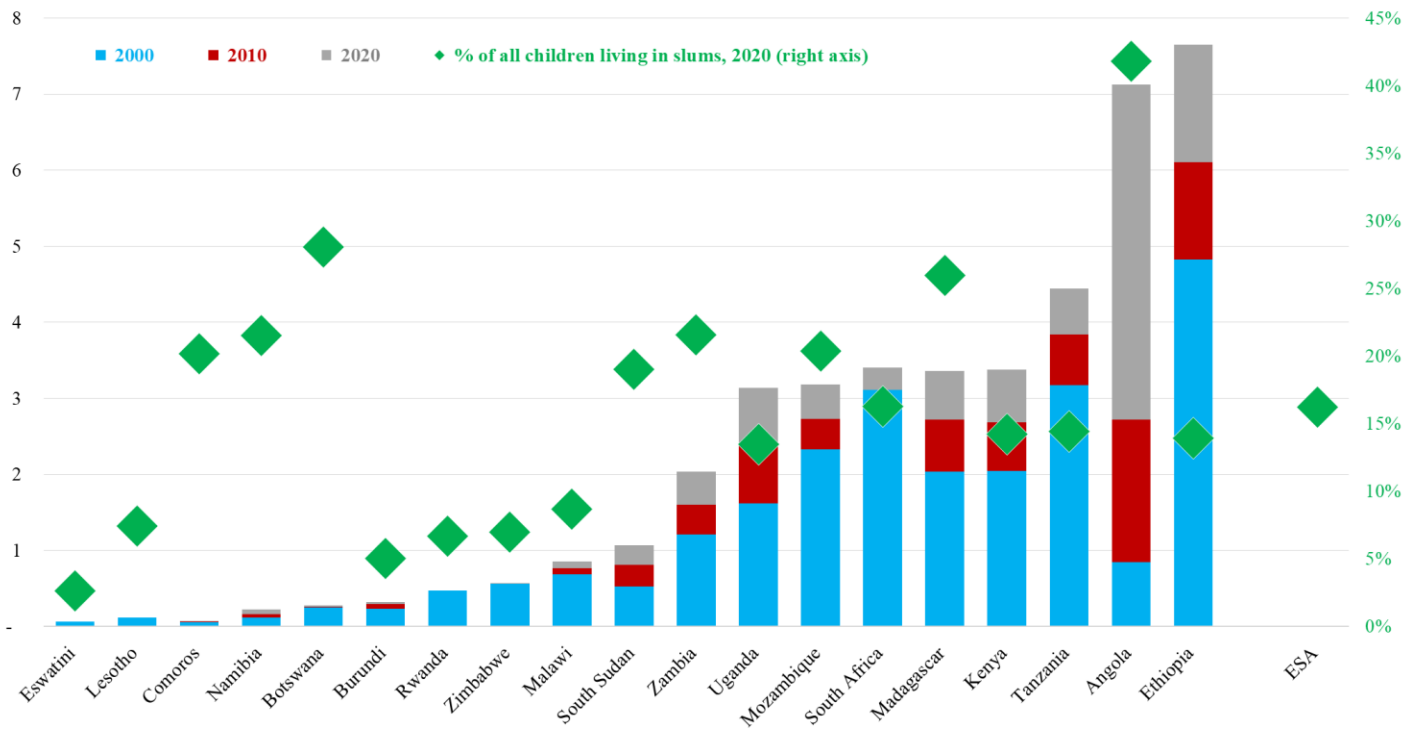
**Figure 5. Population projections in select capital cities in ESA, 2005-35**  
(in millions of persons and as a % increase between 2020 and 2035)



**Figure 6. Projected daily increase in residents of select cities in ESA between 2020 and 2035**  
(in average # of persons)

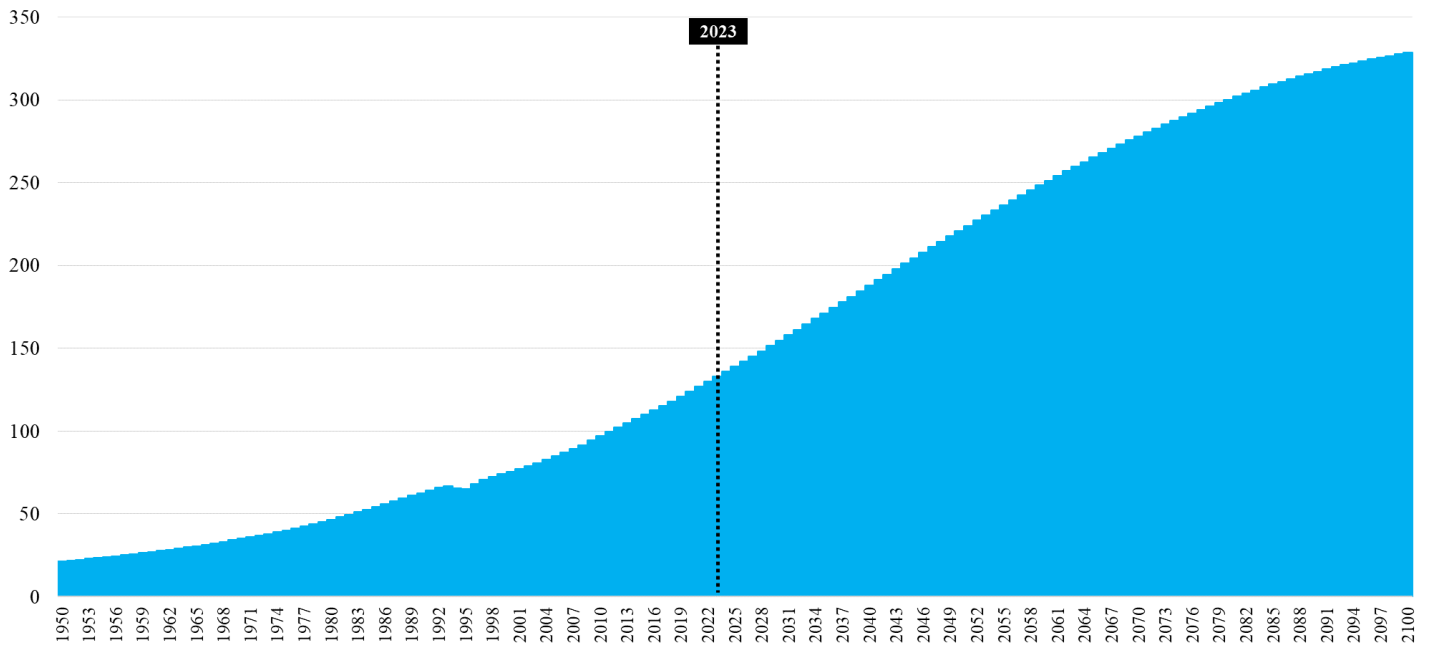


**Figure 7. Children living in urban slums in select countries in ESA, 2000-20**  
(in millions of children and as a % of total child population)



Note: Data is unavailable for Eritrea and Somalia

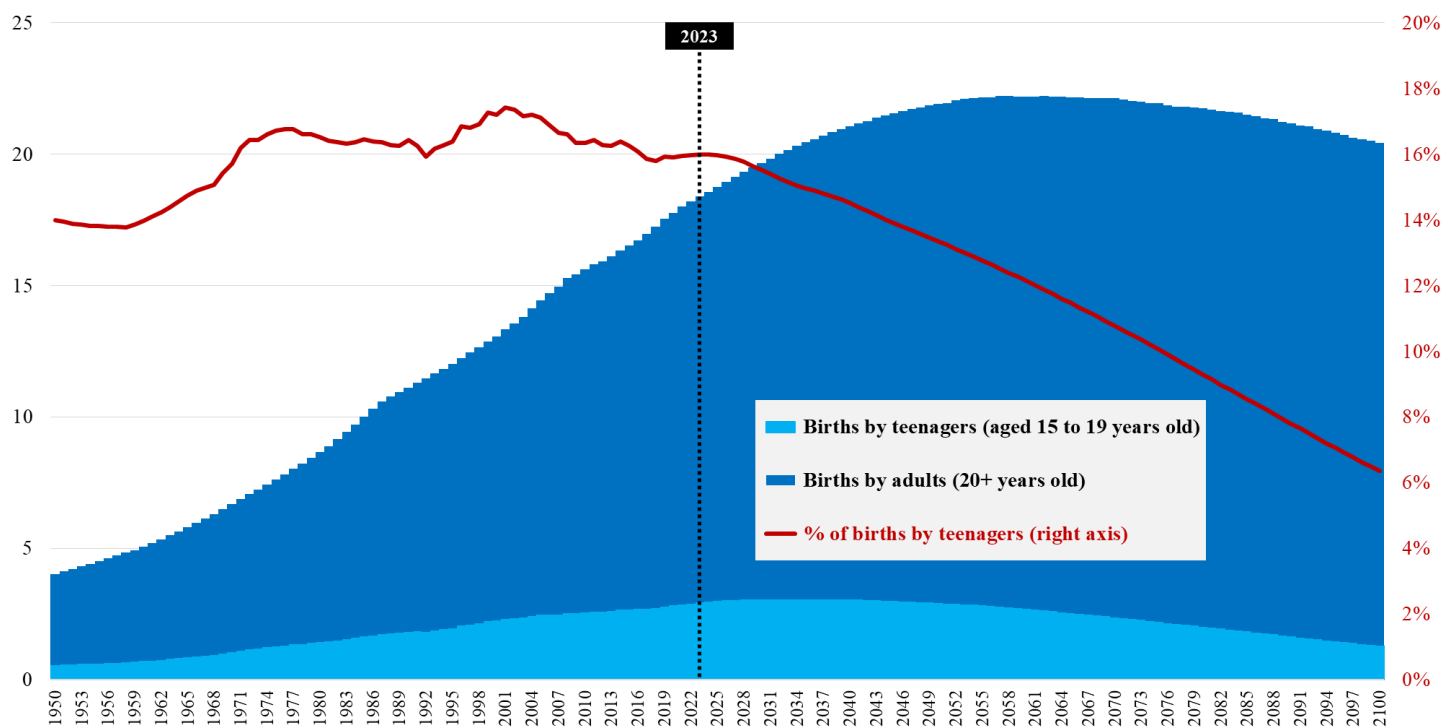
**Figure 8. Population density projections in ESA, 1950-2100**  
(in average # of persons living in a square km)



## Births

- **One of the biggest implications of the demographic boom is the large number of new children that need to be cared for each year:** In 2023, ESA will welcome approximately 18.5 million newborns (Figure 9). This will reach 20 million babies/year around 2030 and peak at more than 22 million/year in the 2060s before starting to slowly decline.
- **The daily pressures on local health facilities are staggering:** More than 50,000 babies are born every day across the region, which amounts to six babies every ten seconds. That's around 4,000/day in Angola and Kenya, close to 5,000/day in Uganda, more than 6,500/day in Tanzania and nearly 11,000/day in Ethiopia.
- **Many new mothers are teenagers:** Approximately three million girls between 15 and 19 years old will become mothers in 2023. This age group accounts for around one out of every six births in ESA, although the share is expected to decline.

**Figure 9. Projected births by 15-19 and 20+ years old in ESA, 1950-2100**  
(in millions of births and teenage births as a % of total)

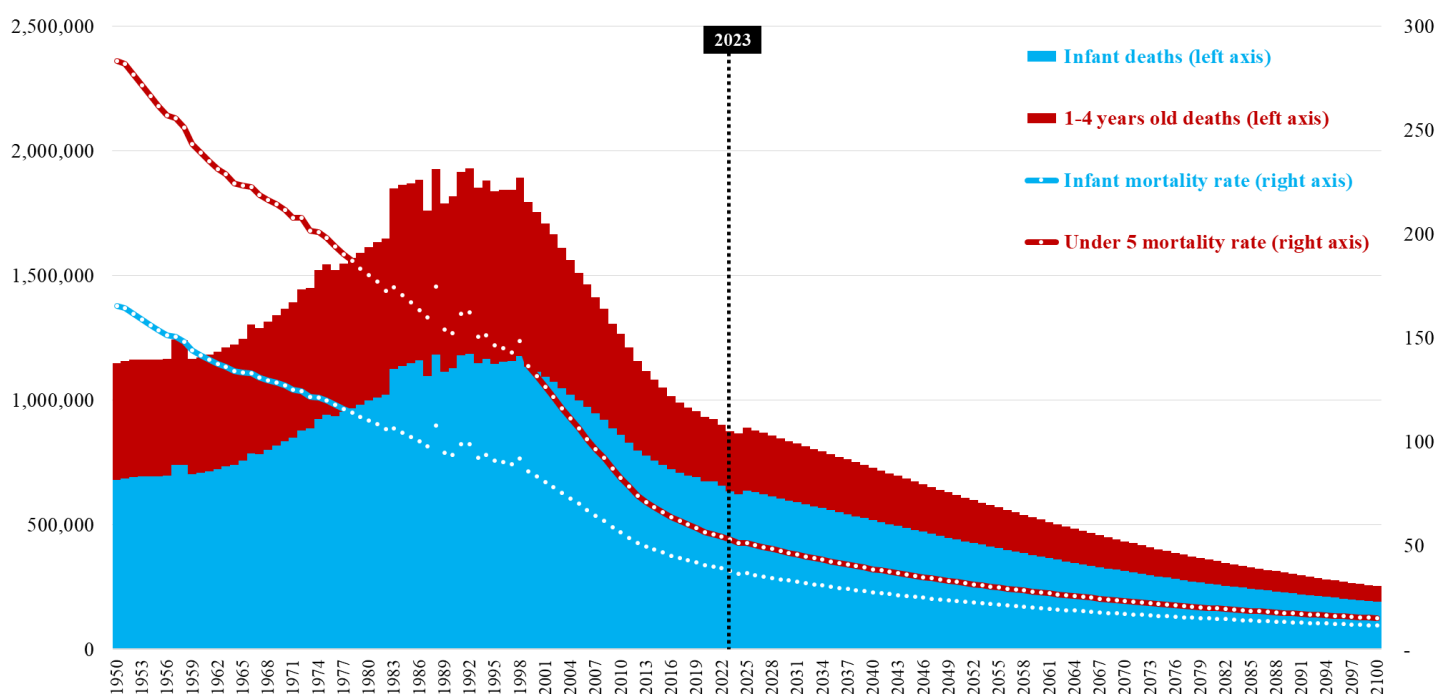


## Child deaths

- **ESA continues to achieve progress in reducing preventable child deaths:** Topping out at nearly two million/year in the early 1990s (or 160 deaths per 1,000 live births), under five deaths are projected to fall to 250,000/year by 2100 (or 15 deaths per 1,000 live births) (Figure 10).
- **Despite the positive momentum, an unacceptable number of children die every year:** Somewhere around 900,000 children under the age of five in the region are expected to die in 2023 (or 53 deaths per 1,000 live births), which amounts to around 100 deaths every hour. Three out of every four deaths occur among infants (0-11 months).

**Figure 10. Under 5 mortality projections by age groups in ESA, 1950-2100**

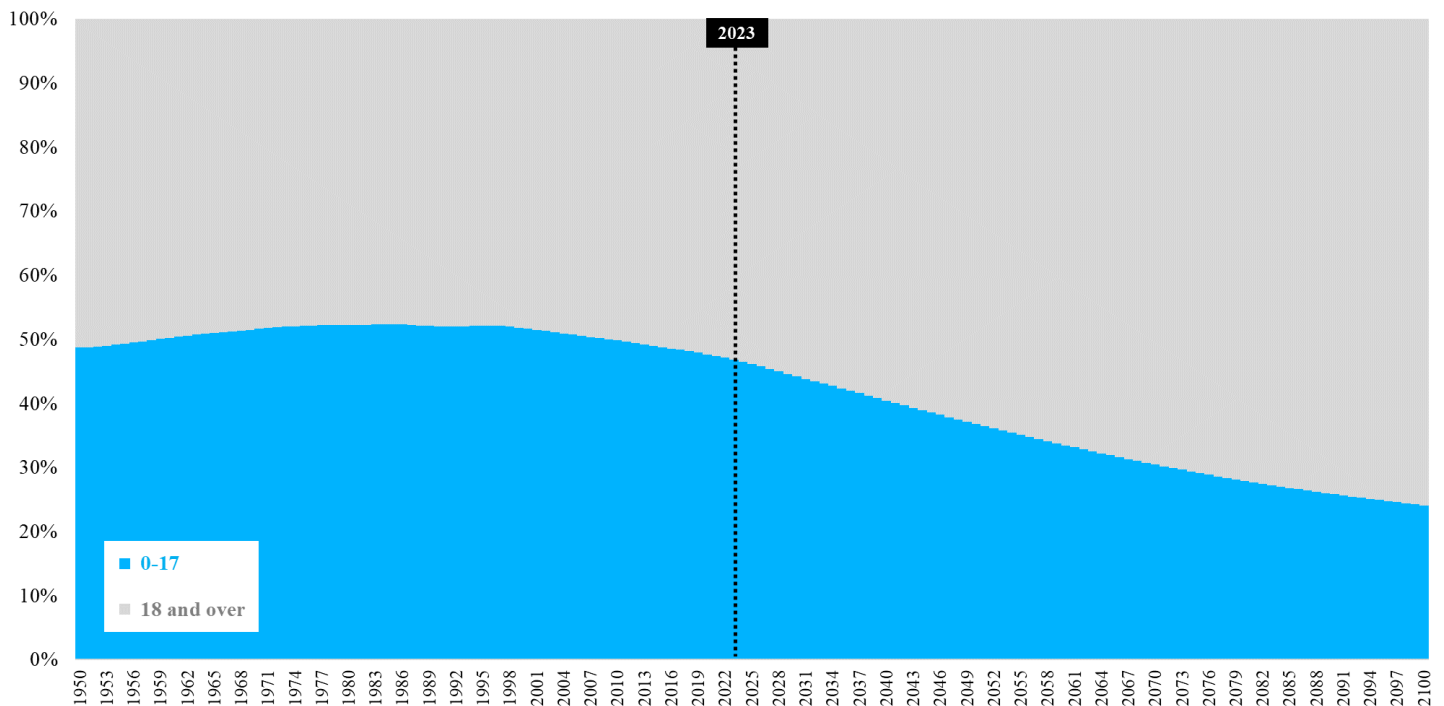
(in # of deaths and deaths per 1,000 live births)



## Child population (0-17 years old)

- **The number of children living in the region continues to soar:** Since 1950, the child population has exploded nearly seven-fold. There are currently around 275 million children, which will surpass 300 million in 2030 and nearly 400 million in the 2070s before starting to slowly decline (see Figure 1 earlier).
- **Children are no longer the majority demographic group in ESA:** While children accounted for more than 52% of the total population in the 1980s, they fell below 50% around 2010 (Figure 11). They currently represent 47% of all people in the region, which is projected to halve by the end of the century (24% in 2100).

**Figure 11. Child and adult population projections in ESA, 1950-2100**  
(as a % of total population)



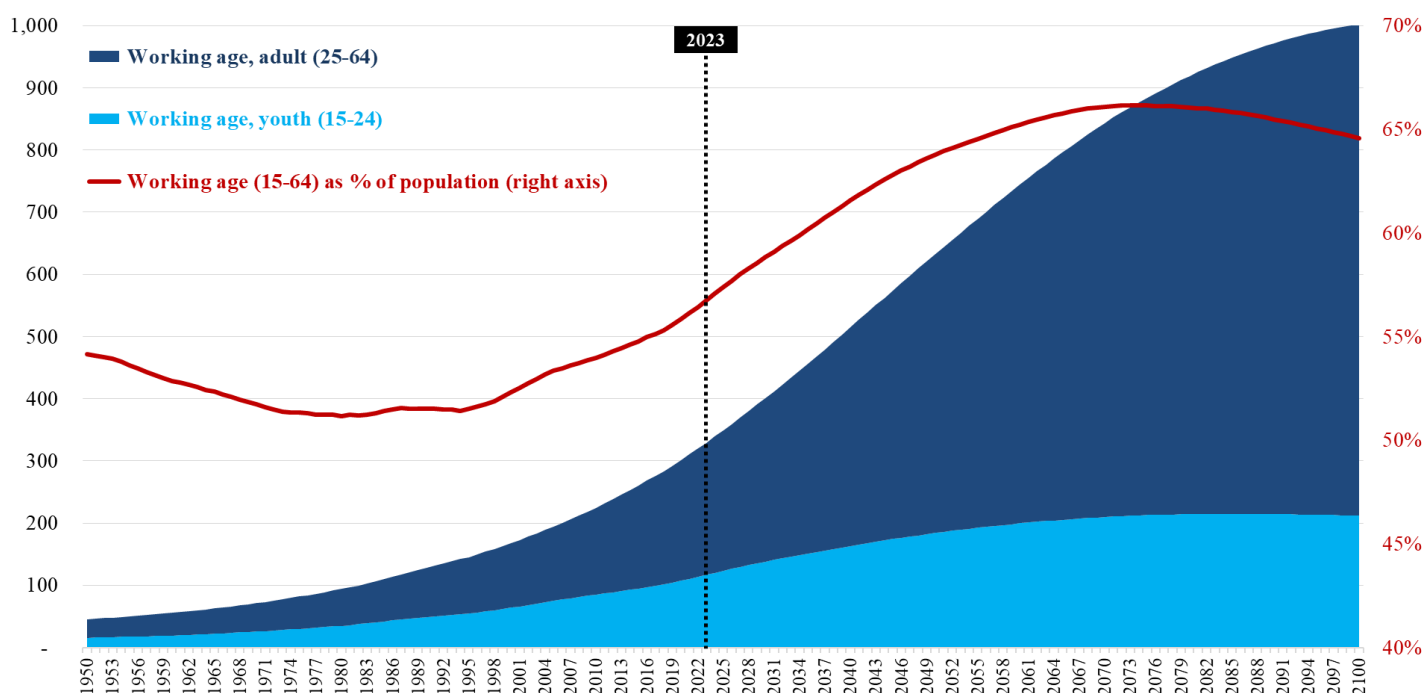


## Labour force

- **The number of working-age bodies is expanding rapidly:** The potential workforce (15-64 years old) will double in 30 years – from 330 million in 2023 to more than 660 million in 2053 (Figure 12). By the end of century, the region will have more than one billion potential workers.
- **Labour markets must continuously absorb the large and increasing number of new workers:** More than 13 million young persons will reach working age in 2023 (defined by the ILO as 15 years old), which amounts to 35,000 potential new workers every day (Figure 13). That number will exceed 20 million/year in 2055 or around 55,000/day.

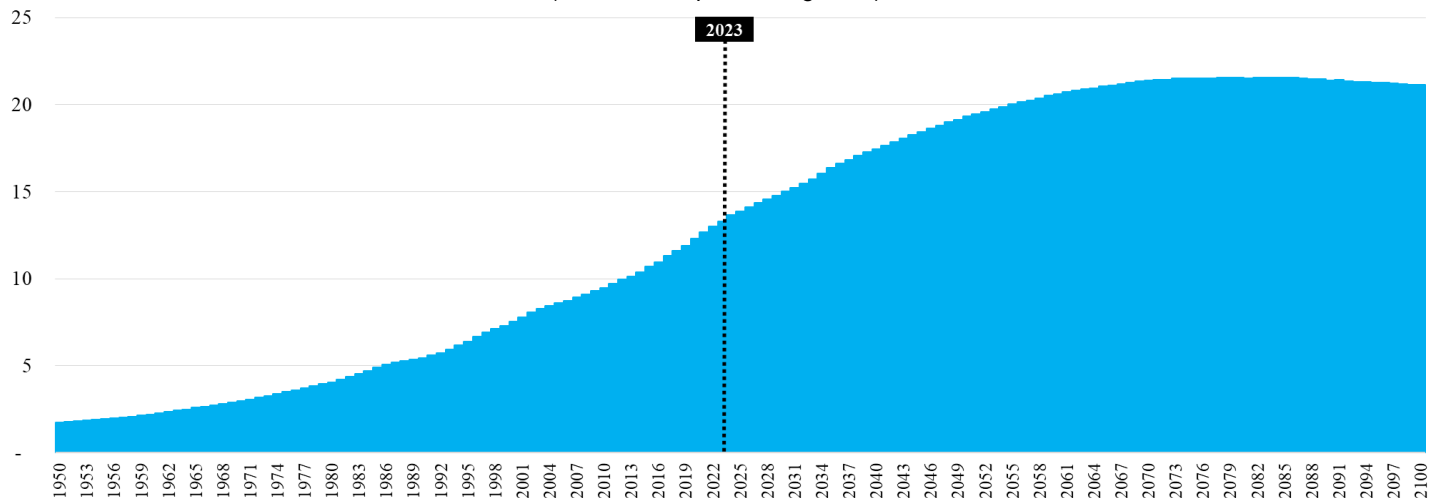
**Figure 12. Youth and adult working age population projections in ESA, 1950-2100**

(in millions of persons and as a % of total population)



**Figure 13. New working age population projections in ESA, 1950-2100**

(in millions of persons aged 15)

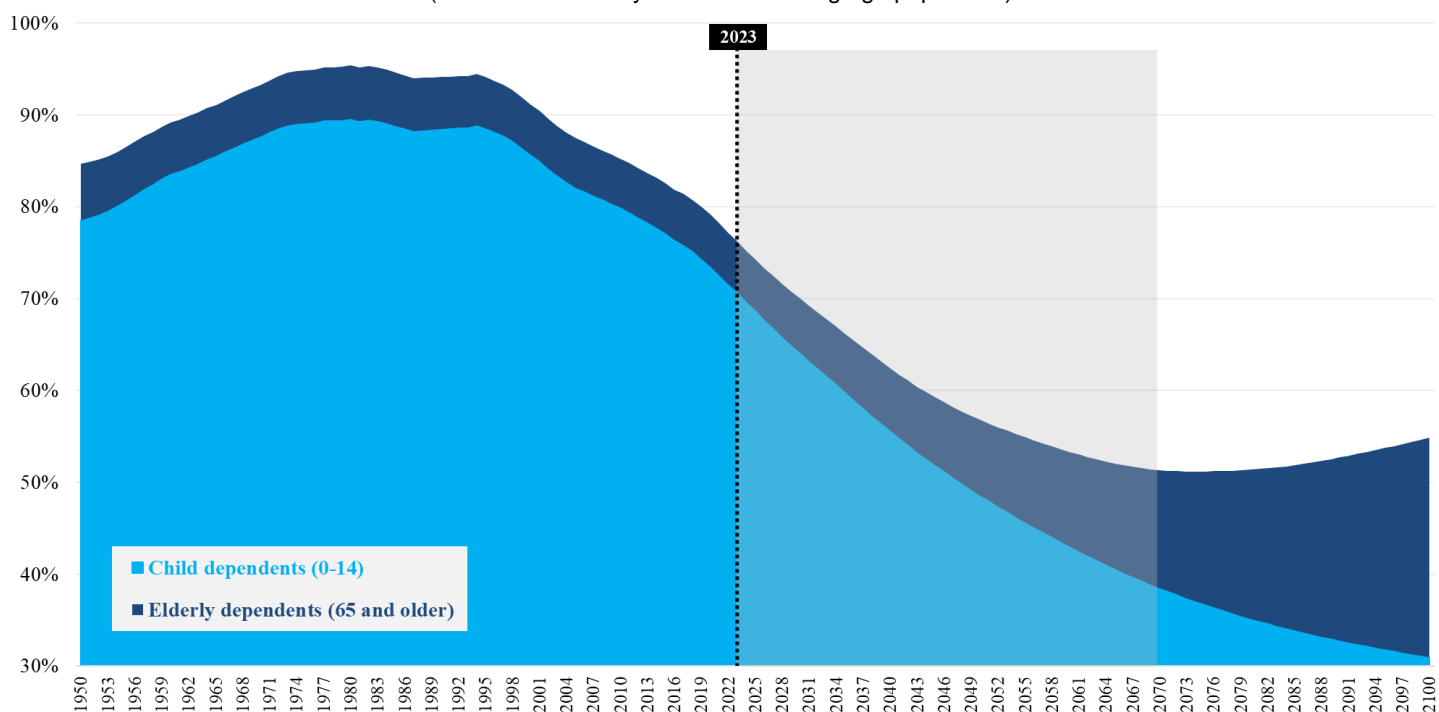


## Dependency ratio

- ESA has approximately 30 years to take advantage of favorable demographic conditions:** The dependency ratio reached 95% in the 1980s (i.e. there were 95 dependents for every 100 potential workers in the population – almost one for one) and has been falling ever since (Figure 14). The current ratio is approximately 75%, which is expected to bottom out around 50% in the 2070s (i.e. when there will be two potential workers for every non-worker) and then start to reverse. However, the rate of change will slow substantially starting in the 1950s, which is roughly when the region’s ‘demographic dividend’ window will start to close.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 14. Young and old dependency ratio projections in ESA, 1950-2100**

(children and elderly as a % of working age population)



<sup>4</sup> The dependency ratio is a good way to measure the ‘demographic dividend’ or economic growth potential that can be achieved when the number of workers in a population increases faster than non-workers. Mathematically, this adds children (under 14) and the elderly (65 and over) and divides that total by the working-age population (ages 15-64). The ratio gets smaller as the size of the economically active population (net producers) grows faster than the dependent population (net consumers). This process unfolds as the demographic profile of a country or region shifts from big families and short lives to smaller families and longer lives, which is the ‘demographic transition’ (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Classical demographic transition model projections in ESA, 1950-2100

Life expectancy  
Fertility rate  
Workforce  
Children  
Working age  
Elderly

1. PRE-TRANSITION	2. EARLY TRANSITION	3. LATE
Low	Rapidly increasing	Stabilizing
High	Rapidly declining	Declining
Stable	Increasing	Stabilizing
Many	Starts decreasing	Decreasing
Stable	Increasing	Stable
Few	Stable	Starts increasing

