Demographic trends for adolescents: Ten key facts

- In 2009, there were 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10–19 in the world, forming 18 per cent of world population. Adolescent numbers have more than doubled since 1950.
- The vast majority of adolescents – 88 per cent – live in developing countries. The least developed countries are home to roughly 1 in every 6 adolescents.
- More than half the world’s adolescents live in either the South Asia or the East Asia and Pacific region, each of which contains roughly 330 million adolescents.
- On current trends, however, the regional composition of adolescents is set to alter by mid-century. In 2050, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to have more adolescents than any other region, marginally surpassing the number in either of the Asian regions.
- India has the largest national population of adolescents (243 million), followed by China (207 million), United States (44 million), Indonesia and Pakistan (both 41 million).
- Adolescents account for only 12 per cent of people in the industrialized world, reflecting the sharp ageing of Europe and Japan in particular. In contrast, adolescents account for more than 1 in every 5 inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the least developed countries.
- Adolescent boys outnumber girls in all regions with data available, including the industrialized countries. Parity is closest in Africa, with 995 girls aged 10–19 for every 1,000 boys in Eastern and Southern Africa and 982 girls per 1,000 boys in West and Central Africa, while the gender gap is greatest in both Asian regions.
- At the global level, adolescents’ share of the total population peaked in the 1980s at just over 20 per cent.
- Although adolescent numbers will continue to grow in absolute terms until around 2030, adolescents’ share of the total population is already declining in all regions except West and Central Africa and will steadily diminish all over the world through 2050.
- One trend that will continue to intensify in the coming decades is that ever more adolescents will live in urban areas. In 2009, around 50 per cent of the world’s adolescents lived in urban areas. By 2050, this share will rise to almost 70 per cent, with the strongest increases occurring in developing countries.

See References, page 78.