

The World at Seven Billion and Growing

Difficulty:



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Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report looked at a recent announcement that the world's population has reached 7 billion. Which countries have the highest populations? Where in the world is population growth slowing down? What are the problems associated with high and low population growth? Should we try to limit the world's population? How?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = Population growth and its effect on a nation's economy.

1. Which countries have the fastest growing populations? What other details can you give about these countries?
 - many poor countries in Africa, and some in Asia.
 - India (2nd highest population at present, 1.2 billion) is growing very fast - it is predicted to overtake China (currently 1.33 billion) by 2025.
 - India has / will have one of the youngest populations in the world.
 - countries with young populations can benefit from the demographic dividend that their skilled young workers bring.
 - the economies in countries with rapid population growth have difficulty in providing public services such as quality education, health care, safe water, sanitation and schooling.
 - in India, for example, nearly 50% of children under five are malnourished.
 - in India, only 10% of young people reach the end of secondary schooling.
2. Which countries have slower-growing populations? What problems of theirs are mentioned?
 - Japan and many European nations.
 - they have aging populations.
 - they may find it difficult to compete in the global market with faster-growing economies.
3. What other details about world population do you remember?
 - No one can be exactly sure when the population reached 7 billion.
 - It reached 6 billion in 1999.
 - It is predicted there will be 9 billion by 2050.
 - It is predicted there will be 10 billion by the end of the century.

4. Which organizations and officials were mentioned in the report?

- United Nations: published the report estimating the population at 7 billion.
- United States Census Bureau: thinks the world population will reach 7 billion in March 2012.
- Sarah Crowe of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in New Delhi: speaks about malnutrition and poor quality education in India.
- Michal Rutkowski, director of human development at the World Bank in South Asia: he is worried by the speed of population growth in Uttar Pradesh in northern India, and says that public policy and public services are not able to cope with this well enough.

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Fast population growth - its advantages and disadvantages.

1. Using India as the example, in what ways is fast population growth an advantage? (a young, energetic population with new ideas, new skills; a large number of people able to work; they have an advantage over the countries with aging populations where the cost of public services such as health care are much higher... other ideas?)
2. Still with reference to India, can you explain in what way the fast population growth causes problems there? (There is not enough good quality food for everyone, and this leads to children being malnourished, and so young people's growth may be stunted. The social infrastructure is developing more slowly than the population, and this leads to a shortage of schools, health care, water and sanitation facilities - and so if the population is not healthy and well-educated, they do not contribute to the economy, but actually take away from it... other ideas?)
3. Is the population growing slowly or quickly in your country? Has it changed in recent years? If so, has this made a difference to the economy and the quality of life? What about the countries near you?
4. Have you visited any of the countries with the fastest population growth? When? Describe your visit.

OR, Topic = Population growth in a country of your choice.

Find out all you can about the history of population growth in your country, including predictions for the future, and give an oral presentation of your findings to a partner or to your teacher. Include any information you can about the effect of the population growth on the economy or the state or the public services. If you prefer, choose a country you have visited, or another country which interests you.

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Is it necessary to limit the world's population?

1. In the report, Michal Rutkowski was quoted as saying that "reaching seven billion people in the world is a good time for a call to action". He said public policy needs to be better organized to cope with population growth. Do you think this is enough? Do you think this is realistic and possible? If not, why not?

2. If you make a graph with the statistics from the report (6 billion-1999; 7 billion-2011; 9 billion-2050; 10 billion-2100), you can see that it is predicted that population will grow at a slower rate. Why do you think this is?
3. Is it possible to limit the world's population (and maintain a gender balance)? How? What methods have been used in the past, and have they worked? Would it be acceptable to insist on certain requirements - for example, that parents must be able to prove they have enough money / intellectual capability, that they are healthy / they are not criminals. If you think ideas like these are too dangerous, must we accept that we can do nothing to control population growth?

Audioscript

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

The United Nations estimates that the world reached seven billion people on Monday. No one can be sure. The United States Census Bureau does not expect that to happen until March.

Populations are growing faster than economies in many poor countries in Africa and some in Asia. At the same time, low fertility rates in Japan and many European nations have raised concerns about labor shortages.

Population experts at the United Nations estimated that the world reached six billion in October nineteen ninety-nine. They predict nine billion by twenty-fifty and ten billion by the end of the century.

China's population of one and a third billion is currently the world's largest. India is second at 1.2 billion. But India is expected to pass China and reach one and a half billion people around twenty twenty-five. India will also have one of the world's youngest populations.

Economists say this is a chance for a so-called demographic dividend. India could gain from the skills of young people in a growing economy at a time when other countries have aging populations. But economists say current rates of growth, although high, may not create enough jobs.

Also, the public education system is failing to meet demand and schooling is often of poor quality. Another concern is health care. Nearly half of India's children under the age of five are malnourished. Sarah Crowe at the United Nations Children's Fund in New Delhi says these two problems "could keep India back."

"That child is unable to really grow to its ability and will remain in a state of stunting and not be able to learn when it goes to school - when he or she goes to school, and indeed later earn and really pay back and pay into the economy and help the country and the region move forward. We have, you know, out of every two hundred million children who start school, only ten percent complete grade twelve."

Michal Rutkowski is the director of human development in South Asia at the World Bank. He says the seven billionth person was likely to be a girl born in rural Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh is one of India's poorest and most crowded states, with nearly two hundred million people.

He says reaching seven billion people in the world is a good time for a call to action.

"I think the bottom line of the story is that the public policy needs to become really, really serious about gender equality and about access to services - to combat malnutrition, and to provide for access to health services, water, sanitation, schooling."

And that's the VOA Special English Health Report. I'm Jim Tedder.