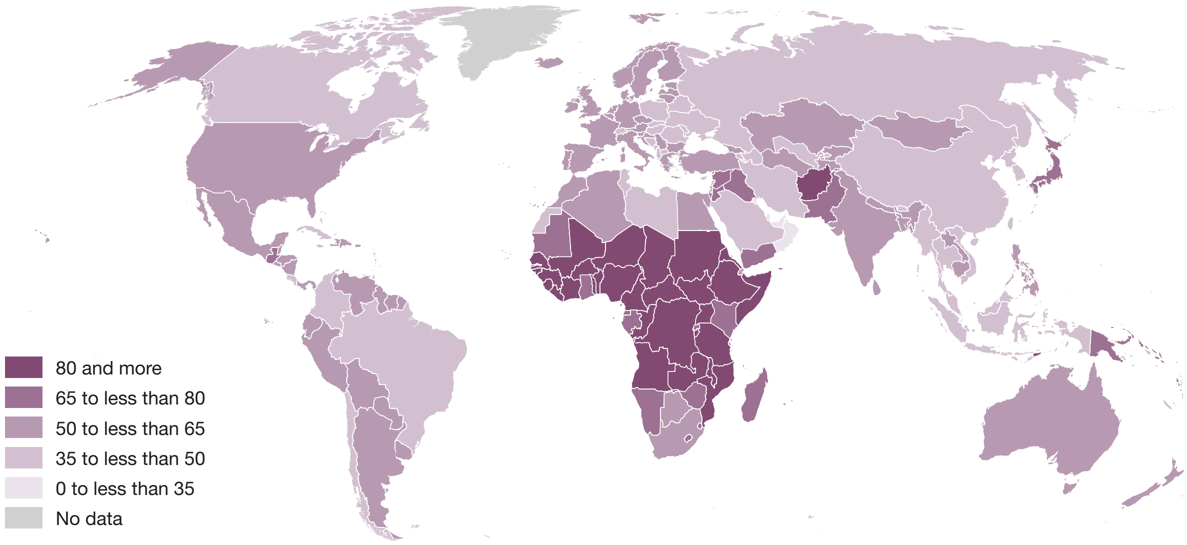
Fact sheet #12: Age structure

Map 1 | **Dependency ratio, 2016** (Percentage)



Concepts and definitions

In this section, the term "persons of working age" refers to persons aged from 15 to 64 years. The term "children" refers to persons under the age of 15. The term "older persons" refers to persons aged 65 years or more.

The dependency ratio is defined as the number of children and older persons per hundred persons of working age. It can be expressed as the sum of the child dependency ratio and the old-age dependency ratio.

The child dependency ratio is defined as the number of children per hundred persons of working age.

The old-age dependency ratio is defined as the number of older persons per hundred persons of working age.

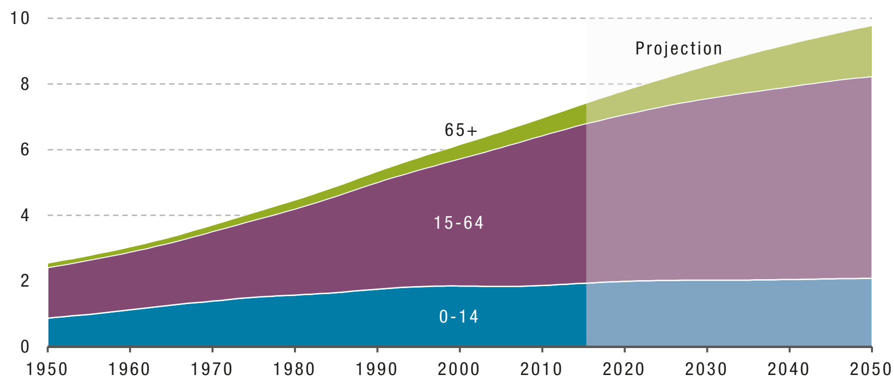
Aging of the world population

In 2016, 66 per cent of the global population were of working age (15 to 64 years old), 26 per cent were children and 8 per cent were 65 years or older. Since the 1960s, the share of children has steadily decreased while the share of older persons has increased. This trend is forecast to continue. According to projections, by the year 2050, 21 per cent of the population will be under the age of 16, and 16 per cent will be older than 64 years.

Dependency ratios throughout the world

In 2016, the highest ratio of non-working age to working age population was found in sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan. This was reflected in dependency ratios higher than 80 per cent. In most developed economies the ratio ranged between 50 and 65 per cent.

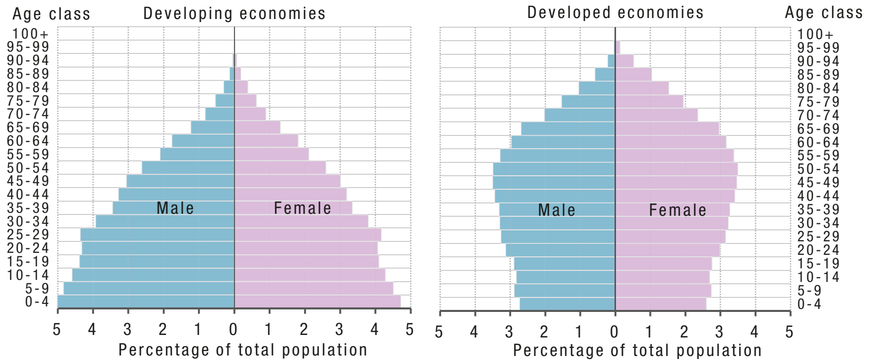
Figure 1 | **World population by age group** (Billions)



Age and gender structure in detail

The population pyramid of developing economies has a triangular shape, as the highest population shares are found in the younger age classes and population shares diminish for older age classes. The population pyramid of developed economies is bell shaped due to substantially smaller relative proportions of young people. In 2016, the largest age class in developed economies was 50 to 54 years. Half of the population was more than 40 years old, whereas in developing economies this was the case for only one third.

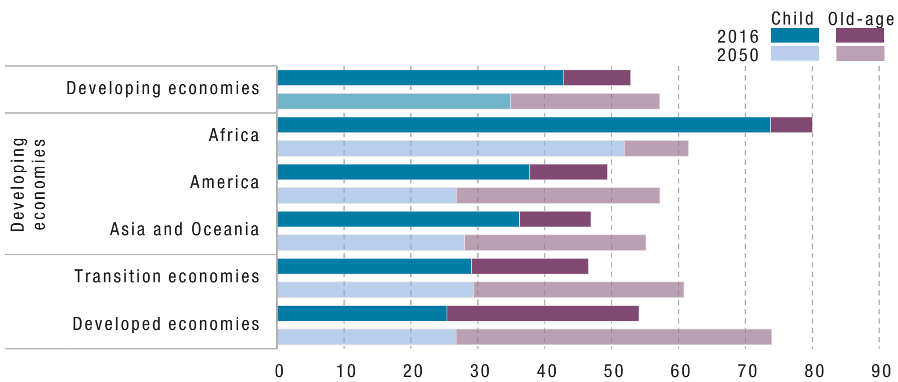
Figure 2 | **Population pyramids, 2016**



Differences in the structure of dependency

While the total dependency ratio of developing and developed economies was similarly high in 2016 – around 53 per cent – the underlying structure was entirely different. Developing economies showed a comparatively high share of child dependency, as reflected by the triangular shape of the age pyramid, whereas in developed economies dependency concerns mainly older persons. As a result of population ageing, in 2050, developed economies are projected to have a higher overall dependency ratio than Africa.

Figure 3 | **Dependency ratio by age structure**
(Percentage)

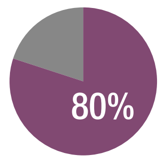


Note: The total dependency ratio is the sum of the child and old-age dependency ratios.

For references, see UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2017, annex 6.4.

66% of the global **population** was of **working age** in 2016

In **Africa**, the **dependency ratio** is **80%**



Greater proportion of **young people** living **in developing** economies than developed

In **developed** economies **old-age** dependency is **high** - and **increasing**