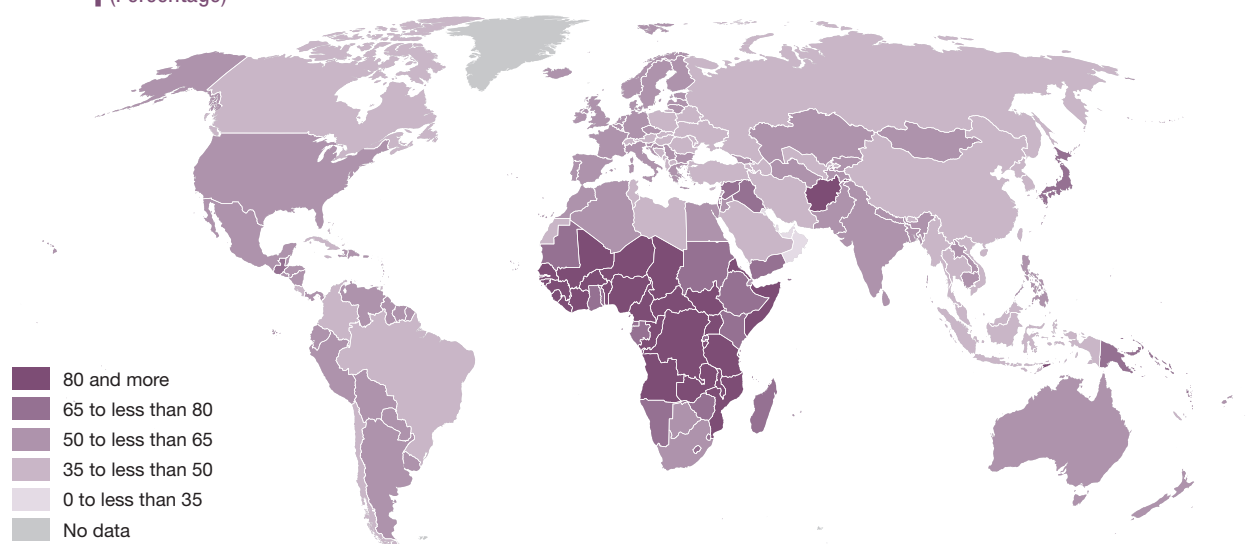




# Fact sheet #12: Age structure

**Map 1** | **Dependency ratio, 2017**  
(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.

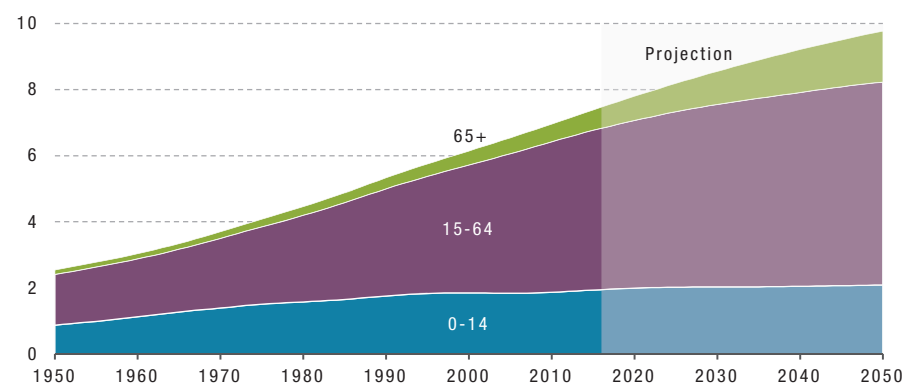
## Aging of the world population

In 2017, persons of working age accounted for 65 per cent of the global population. Children made up 26 per cent and older persons 9 per cent. Since the 1990s, the child population has grown only slightly, by around one tenth, whereas the working age population has risen by one half and the number of older persons has doubled. According to projections, by 2050, only 21 per cent of the global population will be under the age of 15, while 16 per cent will be more than 64 years old.

## Dependency ratios throughout the world

Many Sub-Saharan African economies, in 2017, had on average over 80 persons of non-working age per 100 persons of working age. In most developed economies, this percentage was smaller, as reflected by dependency ratios between 50 and 65 per cent. Lower ratios were characteristic for transition economies and for developing economies in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

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

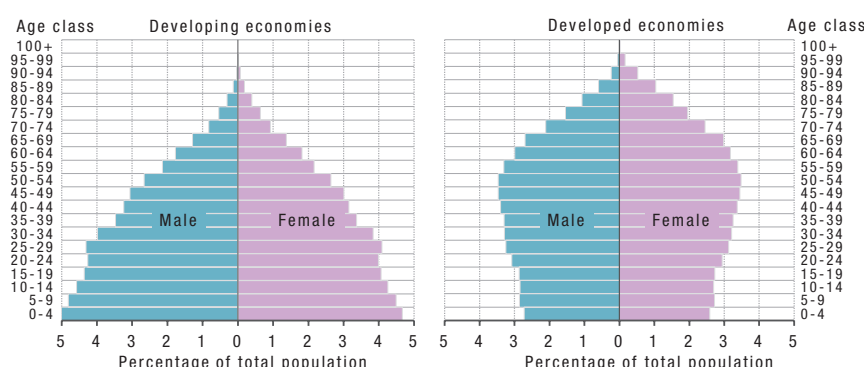




## Evolving population pyramids

The population pyramid for developing economies has a triangular shape with the highest population shares in age classes below 30 years and diminishing shares in older age cohorts. In other words, in 2017, around half of the population in developing economies was younger than 30 years; in developed economies this was the case for only one third. The pyramid for developed economies is bell shaped, displaying a concentration of people in the age classes around 50 years. With extending life expectancy and aging populations, more top-heavy population pyramids are anticipated in the future.

**Figure 2** | Population pyramids, 2017

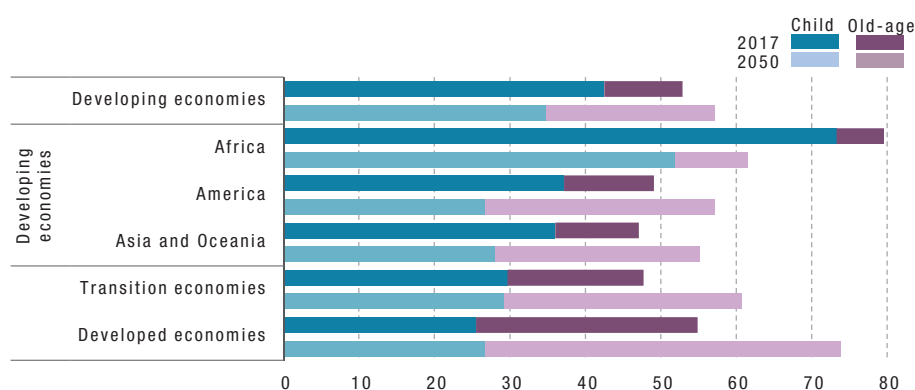


## Differences in the structure of dependency

The average dependency ratio for developing and developed economies was almost the same in 2017, standing at 53 and 55 per cent, respectively. However, developing economies show relatively high child dependency, in accordance with their triangular population pyramid. Child dependency is particularly high in Africa, where it reached 74 per cent in 2017. In developed economies, by contrast, dependency is primarily the result of a large proportion of older persons.

By 2050, child dependency is projected to decrease considerably in developing economies. Old-age dependency is projected to rise throughout the world. By 2050, developed economies are expected to show a higher 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.

Number of persons aged 65+ has almost doubled since 1990



Half of the population in developing economies is younger than 30



In 2017, 74 African children per 100 persons of working age



Old-age dependency projected to rise throughout the world

