

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND



صندوق الأمم المتحدة للسكان

Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.



# Population Dynamics of Sudan

Population variables, growth rates, age structure, fertility and mortality, migration and distribution; among other factors; can powerfully influence every aspect of human, social and economic development. Governments need to be able to gather, track and analyse population variables in order to develop sound sectoral plans to appropriately address both current and future needs. Accurate population data is also essential to measure a country's progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

### Population figures and key facts<sup>1</sup>

As of 2013 Sudan will have a population of 35 million, of which 62% are less than 25 years of age. About two thirds of Sudanese live in rural areas. The population is growing quickly - 2.5% per year - reflecting the relatively high fertility rate and the large population in the reproductive age group. If the current growth rate continues, the country's population will double in only 29 years.

Sudan is a country of great ethnic and geographic diversity, with a history of large-scale population movements and numerous development challenges. Poverty remains widespread; almost half of Sudanese live below the national poverty line, with 75% of the poorest living in rural areas. Poverty varies widely across regions; the lowest poverty incidence is in Khartoum State (26%), and the highest is in North Darfur (69.4%). One quarter of the population has no access to health facilities. The employment rate of the population is only 68%, and the highest unemployment is found among youth age 15-24 years (over 20%). The situation of the Sudanese people is also exacerbated by protracted conflicts and displacements, depletion of natural resources, recurrent natural disasters, and a dramatic economic downturn instigated by the loss of oil revenues after the separation of South Sudan.

### Fertility and mortality

According to the last census, on average a Sudanese woman gives birth to 5 to 6 children in her lifetime. Fertility trends show a slight decline during the last 27 years (compared to 7 children per woman according to 1973 census data), reflecting some degree of improvement in women's access to education and employment which are almost universally associated with smaller family size.

Mortality rates remain relatively high in Sudan, with 17 deaths per 1,000 of Sudan's population annually and infant mortality rates of 118 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy at birth is about 60 years for both sexes, with 61 years for women and 58 years for men. Life expectancy has significantly improved in Sudan (up from 43 years in 1983), although it has improved at a slower pace over the last decade.

According to the Sudan Household Health Survey 2010, the national Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is 216 per 100,000 live births, but the rate varies widely across regions and is disproportionately higher among the poorest, the rural, and the nomads.

### Population structure

Although male births outnumber females, the ratio between the two sexes changes in adulthood. Women outnumber men in every cohort of the population age 20 years and over, which makes Sudan exceptional in this regard. This is most likely due to out migration of Sudanese men.

Sudan has a very high dependency ratio. This means that there are 4 persons of dependent age (under 15 and over 65 years) for every Sudanese of working age (15-64 years). The elderly make up a small share of the population, with only 3% of people age 65 years and over.

The majority of Sudanese household heads are males. However, 28% of households are headed by women, with the proportion being the highest in rural areas. The average household size in Sudan is approximately seven persons.

### Migration and urbanization

Migration is an important factor in Sudan. There are historically high levels of labour migration, a significant nomadic population and millions of people displaced by conflicts or natural disaster.

Migration between states has increased by 5 times during the last 52 years, predominantly from rural to urban areas, thus weakening the rural productive capacity. About 3.7 million people reported migrating in 2008, the

<sup>1</sup> All figures, unless otherwise indicated, are based on the Sudan Population and Housing Census 2008



year of the last census. The majority of migrants are men age 25-40 years. The nomadic groups in the East and West of the country make up 9.1% of the population; they move seasonally across very long distances and have the least access to basic services and the poorest health and education indicators, reflecting their historic marginalization.

Forced migration (due to conflict or natural disaster) remains a significant part of overall migration; more than 4 million people (14% of total population) live in Khartoum, Darfur and other states as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), making Sudan a country with one of the largest displaced populations in the world.

Urbanization in the country is rapidly increasing, predominantly in the national and state capitals. The uneven population distribution as a result of labour migrations has led to considerable variations of population density between states, with Khartoum State being the most populated area (15 times the national average). Many of these migrants continue to live in poverty and lack access to basic services.

The foreign population in Sudan is estimated at around 750,000 people. Around 90% of this cohort is made up of refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries, with a majority of them being young men. At the same time, more than 1.3 million of Sudanese migrate to other countries, mostly in the Arab regions, for economic and education opportunities. This includes a large number of highly educated Sudanese and so represents significant "brain drain" form the country.

#### **UNFPA support to population development**

The International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action and the MDG5 on improved maternal health are the blueprints for UNFPA development support. The agency recognizes the importance of population characteristics for monitoring progress towards these goals and other development plans. To that end, UNFPA supports countries in collecting and using population data for design of policies and programmes at all levels in order to improve the lives of people.

For two decades, UNFPA has been supporting the Government of Sudan in collecting and using population data for planning. Most recently UNFPA supported the process of the Sudan Population and Housing Census 2008 and the second Sudan Household Health Survey 2010, as well as analysis and revision of the National Population Policy and numerous population and development-related research and analyses. The agency works in partnership with, among others, the National Population Council (NPC), Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and Sudan Population Network as well as academic institutions and sectoral ministries.



The Sudan Population and Housing Census 2008 was a major achievement for Sudan and a critical component of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. For the first time in its post-independence history (since 1956), the census covered all parts of the country, including the then Southern Sudan.

Considering the large area, diverse topography and varying climatic conditions across the country, and the complex socio-political context, conducting a population census in Sudan was very challenging. High population mobility and displacement, as well as nomadism, added another dimension to the complexity of this exercise, especially in areas where infrastructure needed for the census was absent or not functioning.

UNFPA provided financial and technical support for the census, and worked with the Government, other UN agencies and development partners to ensure understanding of the census process at grassroots level and dissemination of results.

Sudan's census provided information on demographic, economic and social indicators. The data was key to assessing the implementation of development programmes in the country. It fed into many strategies, including the 5-Year Development Plan 2012-2016, United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and other development policies in the areas of health, economy, education, etc. Census data also played a major part in the preparations for the general election and South Sudan's referendum.

In support of the integration of population issues into Sudan's National Strategic Development Plan (2012-2016), UNFPA has supported the review and revision of the National Population Policy. The policy is intended to provide a better picture of population dynamics in Sudan and their interrelations with socio-economic, political, environmental and cultural development. The agency has also initiated a joint project with the Government and United Nations Environment Program on the interlinkages between population dynamics and environmental degradation in Sudan, as well as their potential to contribute to the peace and development process.

UNFPA also supports collection of population data to provide detailed information for planning and rapid health assessments to allow for appropriate, effective and efficient humanitarian relief. Reliable information –the size, health needs, income, household conditions, age and sex of affected populations, is crucial in planning response following humanitarian crisis.