

## World population to hit 7 billion this month

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The number of people living on the planet is set to reach seven billion this month, leading to renewed concerns about how the Earth's land and resources will be able to support a population that continues to swell.

The milestone will be reached on Oct. 31, according to the UN Population Fund. But while many countries in the developed world face low birthrates and aging populations, growth in developing countries – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – continues to worry many experts.

"As we enter into the 21st century there are increasing doubts about how many people the Earth can sustain," said Robert Walker, executive vice president of the Population Institute, a non-profit group based in Washington.

"Right now we have one billion hungry people and the question is, can we keep up with population growth over the next 40 years as we reach towards 9.3 or even 9.5 billion, according to some projections? There is a lot of concern right now that we might not be able to do that."

The global population hit one billion in 1804, and didn't hit 2 billion until 1927. But the growth rate accelerated so that more than six billion people were living on the planet by the millenium.

Given current population projections, the [International Water Management Institute](#), says that by 2025 about 1.8 billion people will live in areas where water is scarce.

The UN believes the world's population will hit eight billion by 2025 and 10 billion by 2083. But those numbers hinge on a number of factors, including access to birth control, child mortality and life expectancy rates.

Experts say that poverty is a key ingredient in population growth, and that the challenge is how to encourage smaller families, particularly in poorer areas of the world.

Meanwhile, Walker said that countries such as Canada and the United States have been providing less money to "family planning and related activities" when they need to be giving more funds to such programs.

"One of the things that we want to do is to make sure that the United States, Germany, France, Canada, Japan and other donor nations do their part to make sure that women everywhere have access to contraceptives," Walker told CTV News Channel on Sunday.

"But we also need innovative new programs that are designed really to keep girls in school."

John Bongaarts, a vice president at the Population Council, a research organization based in New York, cautioned that while the planet has absorbed a large increase in the human population in recent decades, the strains from that trend are growing worse.

"For the rich, it's totally manageable," he said. "It's the poor, everywhere, who will be hurt the most."

*With files from The Associated Press*

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