Sub-Saharan Africa: Data and Facts

With an area of 23.6 million square kilometres, the region of sub-Saharan Africa is larger than the United States, Canada and the EU combined.

Population

**Population Growth.** The sub-Saharan Africa region records the highest population growth rates worldwide. According to UN projections, the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa is likely to double to two billion by 2050. The high population growth is a result of the young age structure, the continuing high fertility and the increasing life expectancy. Women in sub-Saharan Africa have an average number of just under five children, with an average of six in Uganda and seven in Niger.

**Age Structure.** Almost half of the population – 42 per cent – is younger than 15 years of age. For every 100 people of working age there is an average of 84 people that need support, i.e. people that are very young and old. In Niger und Uganda, 100 employable persons even have to support approximately 105 younger or elderly people.

**Urbanisation.** Over 60 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa lives in rural areas, yet with an urbanisation rate of four per cent, the urban populations are growing faster than in any other region of the world. In just 40 years, the proportions between urban and rural populations might be reversed.

**Education and Health**

**Education.** In most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the education system is considerably weak: first, there are not enough school places available, and second, the quality of instruction is poor. In Niger and Ethiopia, only one in every four of today’s 20- to 64-year-olds has attended school. In Ghana and Mali, only half of the primary school teachers have received adequate training.

**Women’s Education.** In terms of education there is a large gender gap. Boys are more likely to attend school than girls. Among young adults the illiteracy rate is thus higher among women.
than among men. In Benin and Sierra Leone, for every 100 men ages 15 to 24 who are able to read and write, there are only about 70 women who can do the same.

**Health Risks.** There are major shortcomings in medical care in sub-Saharan Africa: in many countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi, and Mozambique, for example, there is not even one trained physician available for every 10,000 inhabitants. Combating malaria, HIV/Aids and tuberculosis, as well as high maternal, infant and child mortality rates, are among the greatest challenges. In 27 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, every tenth child dies before reaching his or her fifth birthday. Swaziland and Botswana have the highest HIV/Aids rates in the world – about one quarter of the 15- to 49-year-old population is infected.

**Reproductive Health and Family Planning**
In sub-Saharan Africa, a woman’s risk of dying as a consequence of pregnancy is the greatest worldwide, with one death per 31 pregnancies. In comparison: in Germany, there is only one death per 11,100 pregnancies. In the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, not even one out of every two births is attended to by a doctor or a midwife. If complications arise, this can mean a quick death for the woman. Women risk their lives with each birth – at the same time it is difficult to plan pregnancies. 80 per cent of married women of child-bearing age have no access to modern contraceptives.

**Economy and Employment**
**Poverty.** In terms of per capita income, sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world. 72 per cent of the population lives on less than US$ 2 a day.

**Labour Market.** About 70 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa over the age of 15 has a paid job, even though most are low paying. The proportions fluctuate between about 50 per cent in Mali and 90 per cent in Burundi. In many places the majority of people are employed in agriculture. In Tanzania, three out of four people capable of gainful employment work in that field.

**Economic Growth.** Over the past decade, foreign direct investments in sub-Saharan Africa have tripled. However, economic performance varies considerably across African states south of the Sahara. Due to the oil boom, Angola’s economic growth stood at an average of 15 per cent during the past five years. Eritrea and Zimbabwe, however, had negative growth rates during that same period.