10 June 2011 | Geneva - **The number of countries collecting all their blood supplies from voluntary unpaid donors increased by more than 50 per cent between 2002 and 2008**, according to new global data from the **World Health Organization** (WHO), released on **World Blood Donor Day**, 14 June.

World Blood Donor Day is celebrated each year to highlight the contribution voluntary unpaid blood donors make to public health. This year's slogan, "More blood, more life" aims to encourage still more people to come forward to give blood and save more lives.

"WHO's goal is for all countries to obtain all blood supplies from voluntary unpaid donations by 2020," says Dr Neelam Dhingra, Coordinator, Blood Transfusion Safety at WHO. "Nine years ago, 39 countries were obtaining all their blood supplies from voluntary unpaid donors: in 2008 that figure had gone up to 62. We hope that World Blood Donor Day will encourage more people in more countries to become regular voluntary blood donors."

In 70 countries, voluntary unpaid blood donations rose by more than 10 per cent between 2007 and 2008. India reported the greatest increase, from 3.6 million to 4.6 million. Other countries reporting substantial increases over the same period include: Afghanistan, Algeria,

Argentina, Belarus, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, Japan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, United States of America and Vietnam.

The WHO data reveals new information about the gender and age of donors. Some 100 countries provide data on gender, revealing that 70 per cent of all blood donations are collected from male donors. Just 25 countries collect more than 40 per cent of their blood supplies from female donors. They include Australia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Swaziland, Thailand, United States of America and Zimbabwe. And in 16 countries, less than 10 per cent of donations come from female donors.

In richer countries, donors tend to be older (over 44). In low and middle income countries, they are younger (under 25). Seventy-seven countries provide data on distribution of blood donations by age group. In high income countries, only 27 per cent of donations are from the under-25 age group, while 40% of donations are collected from donors older than 44 years old. In low and middle-income countries, almost half (45 per cent) of all donations come from people under 25, and 18 per cent from the over-44 age group.

"One obvious reason why there are more younger donors in low-income countries is because the overall population tends to be younger," adds Dhingra. "Strategies to encourage more people to give blood voluntarily need to take factors like this into consideration."

Starting 14 June, a week-long programme of high-profile events celebrate voluntary blood donation. This year, Buenos Aires, Argentina, is the international host for World Blood Donor Day, with special football matches, a national marathon, and the culmination of a months-long "Domino Project", which has been building awareness and mobilizing blood donations through all regions of Argentina, one after the other.

In Geneva, Switzerland, home to the World Health Organization's headquarters, the local community is gathering school children and other volunteers to stand together all dressed in red to form a human blood drop. The event takes place at the Place des Nations from 10h00 local time on 14 June. Geneva celebrations also include lighting up the Jet d'eau, one of the city's most prominent landmarks, in the colour red.

WHO estimates that blood donation by at least 1 per cent of the population is generally sufficient to meet a country's basic requirements for safe blood. Requirements are higher in countries with more developed health systems. Among the greatest needs: to replace blood lost in childbirth (a major cause of maternal deaths worldwide), and to treat severe anaemia that threatens the lives of thousands of children who have malaria or are undernourished.

Related links: www.who.int/worldblooddonorday