

NAVIGATING MEGATRENDS: The ICPD Programme of Action for a Sustainable Future



Demographic Change and Sustainability

Acknowledgements

Authors: Stuart Gietel-Basten (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), Rachel Snow (Consultant)

Contributors: Michael Herrmann (UNFPA), Roman Hoffmann (IIASA), Eduardo Klien (HelpAge), Douglas Massey (Princeton University)

Reviewers: David Anthony (UNICEF), Carmen Barroso (Women Deliver), Patrick Gerland (UNDESA), Alessio Cangiano, Tierney McCue (UNFPA), C. Katharina Spiess (Federal Institute for Population Research), Sivananthi Thanenthiran (Asia-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Elizabeth Wilkins (UNFPA), UNFPA ICPD30 Reference Group, UNFPA Regional Offices, UNFPA Executive Committee

Coordination, Editorial, Design and Production

Senior Editors and Overall Technical Coordination: Priscilla Idele (UNFPA), Rachel Snow (Consultant)

Strategic Oversight: Julia Bunting, Julitta Onabanjo (UNFPA)

Editorial: Gretchen Luchsinger (Words for the World)

Communications, Advocacy and Web: Ana Maria Currea, Jacqueline Daldin, Unis Lebbie, Etienne Leue, Angélique Reid (UNFPA)

Design: Upasana Young (GlowDesign)

Operations and Administrative Support: Sara Abranyos, Ashby Anglin, Elsa Dufay, Abbas Omaar, Rayola Osanya (UNFPA)

Copyright © 2024 United Nations Population Fund, all rights reserved.
Reproduction is authorized provided the source is acknowledged.

How to cite this publication: United Nations Population Fund (2024).
Navigating Megatrends: The ICPD Programme of Action for a Sustainable Future
ICPD30 Think Piece: Demographic Change and Sustainability

July 2024

Disclaimer: The named authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this publication.

Maps and designations: The designations employed and the presentation of material in maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNFPA concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Cover photo © UNFPA

Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Demographic Diversity in a World of 8 Billion	6
	▶ Population ageing	8
	▶ The uncertainties of migration	11
	▶ The climate crisis and population dynamics	15
3	Population Anxieties and Policies	18
4	Pathways to a Sustainable Future: The Relevance of the ICPD	21
	▶ Population policies and the ICPD Programme of Action: strengthening resilience	21
5	Reflections and Recommendations: Policies for Population Well-Being	23
6	Conclusion	26
	References	28
	Endnotes	30

Two thirds of the human population now lives in a country with fertility below the replacement level of approximately 2.1 children per woman

In mid-2024, UNFPA issued five think pieces to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Under the framing of *Navigating Megatrends: The ICPD Programme of Action for a Sustainable Future*, the five think pieces are titled:

- ▶ **Demographic Change and Sustainability**
- ▶ The Future of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- ▶ The Future of Population Data
- ▶ ICPD and Climate Action
- ▶ A Safe Digital Future

The think pieces explore ways to sustain, refresh and accelerate ICPD commitments in a world undergoing radical transformation. Designed for development actors and policymakers, they reflect on progress and highlight likely future scenarios, and offer starting points for discussion on what's next for population, development, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

This think piece highlights key findings and recommended actions on demographic change and sustainability. It suggests how leaders can harness population dynamics to accelerate sustainable development.

This think piece highlights key findings and recommended actions on demographic change and sustainability

1 | Introduction

We live in a unique demographic moment. The United Nations Secretary-General considers demographic shifts one of the most important megatrends defining progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ Yet demographic situations vary greatly between and within countries and regions. Often, these diverse demographic situations lead to anxieties. This was similarly the case in the lead up to the ICPD 30 years ago. The resulting ICPD Programme of Action established the centrality of promoting the rights and choices of individuals over numerical population targets. At that time, the perceived threat of high fertility and “overpopulation” led to active debate on reproductive rights and choices. Today, a similar debate has emerged, this time around reproductive rights versus a perceived threat of population decline and (very) low fertility. Concerns about both “overpopulation” and “underpopulation” are fuelled by other global concerns, including climate change, pandemics, conflicts, mass displacement and economic uncertainty.

Some countries are concerned about rapid population growth; others worry about rapid decline. Some countries are alarmed by “too many” immigrants while others fear the consequences of rapid emigration. The perception of “too many” younger or older people is considered an existential crisis. These anxieties, in turn, link to fears for the future of institutions and systems impacted by demographic change: health, education and social services; pensions; labour and employment; urban development; economic growth; social cohesion and even defence.

In response to these anxieties, governments sometimes implement policies seeking “demographic solutions” to perceived “demographic problems”, pushing back against the values embodied in the ICPD Programme of Action.² Examples include policies to raise or lower the fertility rate, or policies to restrict migration. Such a two-dimensional approach rarely succeeds. It often misses the point by not addressing underlying causes and simultaneously distracting leaders from preparing and adapting for approaching demographic futures.

Starting from a high-level overview of population trends and projections, this paper unpacks key intersections between future demographics and other megatrends, including ageing, migration, urbanization and climate mobility. It features experts imagining “better or worse” scenarios in relation to ageing, migration and climate change (Boxes 1, 2 and 3), and highlights policy scenarios consistent with the vision, values and principles of the ICPD in collectively preparing for the future.

The paper illustrates how the vision, principles and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action are as vital today as they were 30 years ago. Endorsed by 179 countries, the Programme of Action placed individuals at the heart of sustainable development. This paper highlights how this mandate can be reimagined to secure a world where regardless of demographic trends, people retain the right to decide on the number and timing of their children, both people and the planet can thrive, and societies are resilient to demographic change.



2 | Demographic Diversity in a World of 8 Billion

The diverse demographic patterns shaping contemporary development are the legacy of past decades of health and development and often positive changes.³ Mortality rates, from babies to centenarians, have declined worldwide. Improved access to SRH services, greater education, women's empowerment, urbanization, industrialization and other social and economic changes have resulted in declining fertility rates. A seemingly steadfast trend towards below-replacement fertility (the level at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next) operates around the world. The number of countries with below-replacement fertility is projected to increase, making low fertility a more relevant policy issue for more governments than ever before.⁴

Even so, different parts of the world are at varying stages of their demographic journey. Fertility rates remain high in many settings, including where fertility preferences are lower than the actual number of births. The "high fertility world" is primarily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa but includes countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, among others. To put regional variations in fertility into context, in 2023, it was estimated that there would be more births in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (4.4 million)⁵ than in the entire European Union (3.8 million).⁶ While West and Central Africa have numerous countries with total fertility rates between five and six children per woman, some Eastern European and East Asian countries are regularly posting total fertility rates of around one child per woman, some of the lowest fertility rates in peacetime human history.

Even as premature mortality declines, completing the "last mile" in reducing preventable infant, child and maternal mortality is proving challenging. Very high under-five mortality is still a key feature of a belt of countries across central Africa, and rates remain high in select countries in other regions, including Afghanistan, Haiti, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea.⁷

Another dimension of current demographic diversity is the pace and scale of changes. Some countries took over a century to transition from higher to lower mortality and fertility rates, while others did so in just a few decades. Some countries have imposed wide-ranging anti-natalist policies to control fertility; others have not. Many low-fertility countries are urban, while others remain half rural. Some countries "got rich before they got old", largely by investing heavily in human capital and reaping a demographic dividend. Other countries have very young populations (the median age in Africa is about 19 years while in Europe it is about 45 years) and have yet to harness their demographic dividend.

Yet even in this demographically diverse world, shaped by diverse histories, demographers are relatively confident about some features of the near future that are consistent across different population projections. This is because the general patterns of demographic change are relatively slow moving and predictable, with the crucially important exception of migration. Common agreements about the coming demographic future include:

- ▶ Mortality rates will continue to generally improve, and the absolute and relative number of older persons will increase.
- ▶ High fertility rates will continue to decline, and low and very low fertility rates will stay relatively that way; household size will continue shrinking.

- ▶ Global population growth will continue but at a decreasing rate over the next several decades.
- ▶ The proportion of the population that is urban will continue to grow.
- ▶ Migratory flows will continue and may increase, both from rural to urban settings and from poorer to wealthier countries.

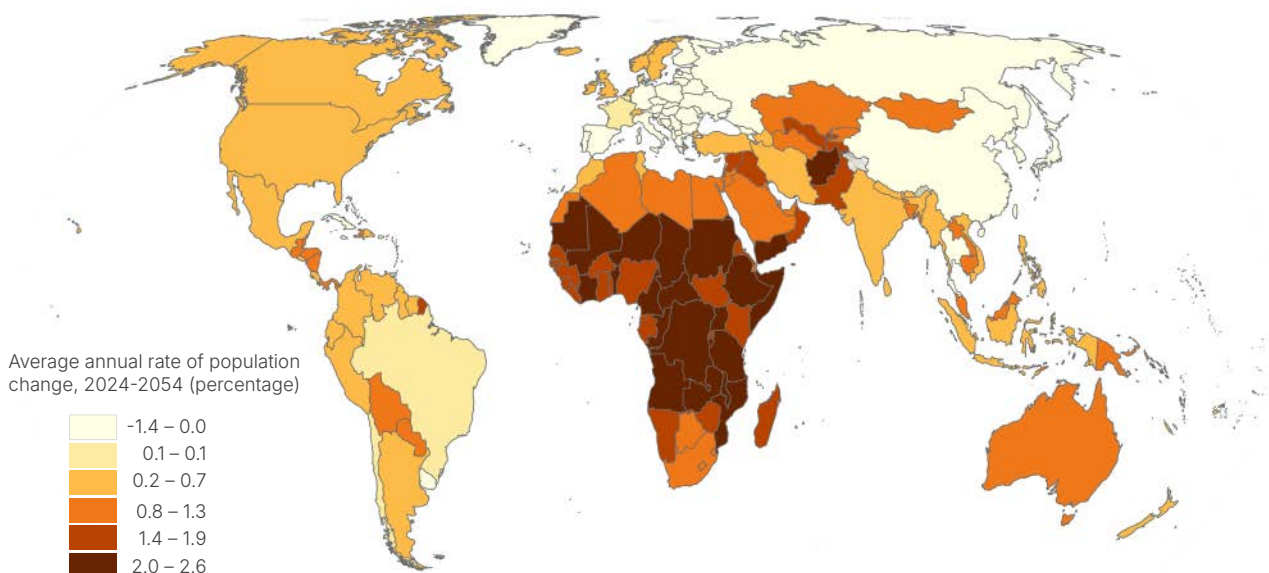
Several countries where the average fertility rate has recently declined below the replacement level will continue to have growing populations because, with large cohorts entering reproductive age, there will continue to be more births than deaths (for example, in India).

Across countries, there will inevitably be diversity in overall growth (Figure 1). In 2023, 13 countries saw annual population growth rates greater than 3 per cent per year, which if sustained would double population size every 23 years. In sub-Saharan Africa, population growth is forecast to continue until the end of the century.⁸

In 2023, around 50 countries and territories worldwide saw negative population growth. From 2024 to 2054, an estimated 60 countries and territories are projected to experience population decline. China will experience the sharpest absolute decline (-200 million), while in relative terms some European and island nations will see the largest drops (Figure 2).

▶ FIGURE 1

Average annual rate of population change, 2024-2054

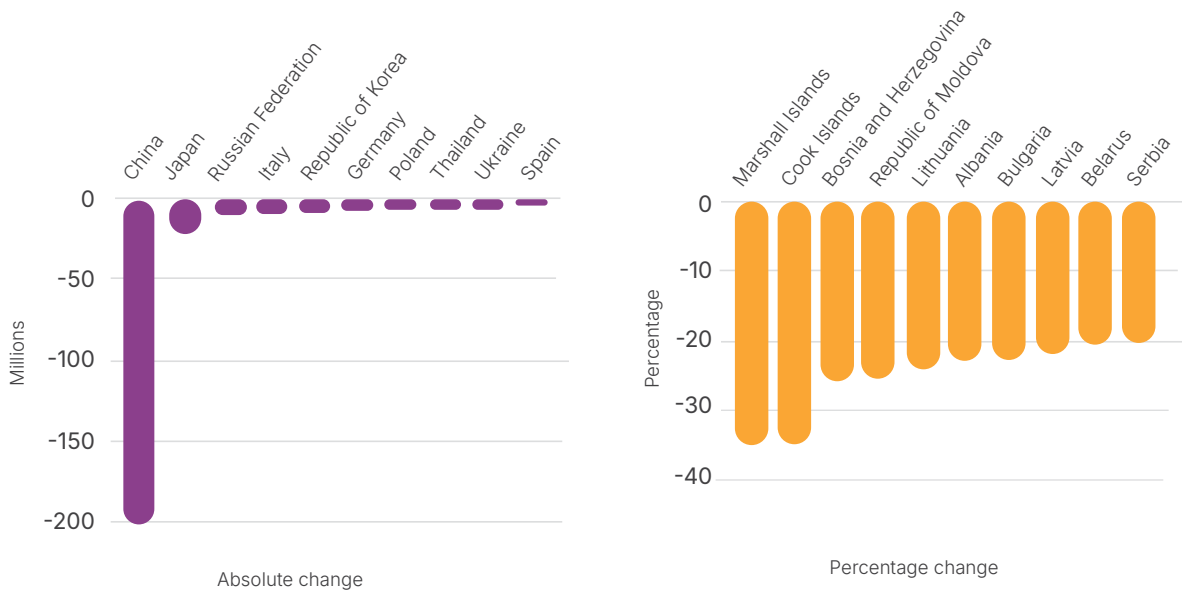


Source: UNFPA calculations based on data from UNDESA, Population Division, 2024.

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

▶ FIGURE 2

Absolute and relative population declines, 2024-2054



Source: UNFPA calculations based on data from UNDESA, Population Division 2024.

Population ageing

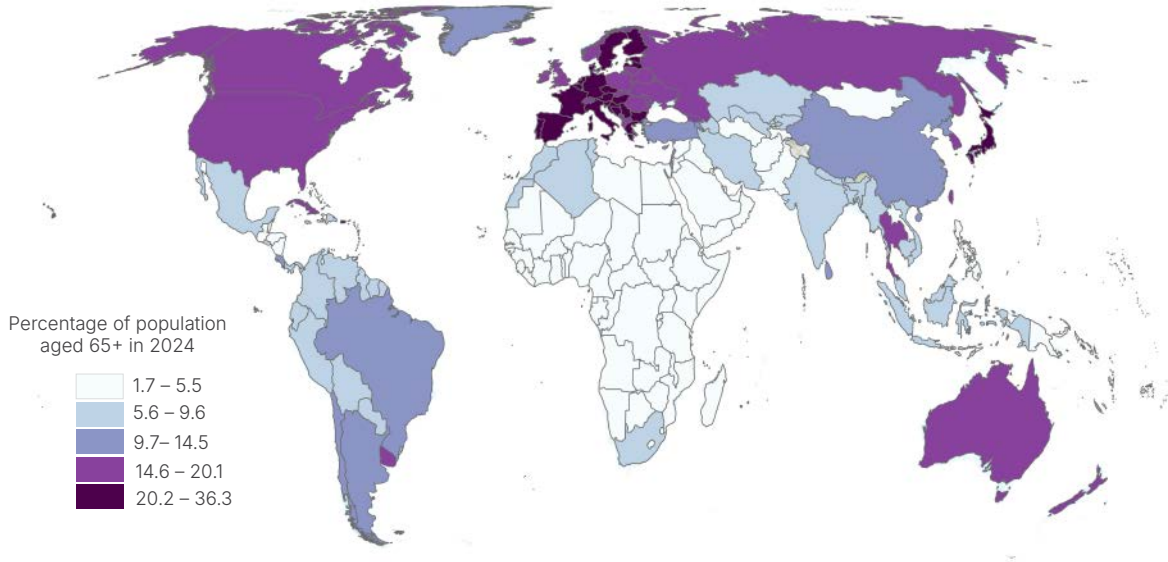
Population ageing will continue to be a universal phenomenon even as it varies by country in scale and pace. As the epidemiological transition works its way through the population’s health and fertility declines or stays low, the overall structure of world population will age.¹⁰ Globally, the median age is projected to rise from 30.6 years in 2024 to 36.9 in 2054.¹¹ But these numbers mask diverse regional and national patterns of ageing (Figure 3).

In 2023, the median age was below 15 years in the world’s youngest country (the Central African Republic) and close to 49 years in Japan. By 2050, the median age in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to be 23.4 years, while in East and South-East Asia it is projected to be around double that, at 47.0. In addition to changes in median age, the absolute and relative number of older persons in every country will most likely increase. Absolute numbers will be primarily driven by declining mortality rates and relative numbers by declining fertility rates. Currently, older people aged 65 and above outnumber children aged 0 to 14 in more than 50 countries. In other words, 11 per cent of the world’s population lives in countries with more older people than children, a proportion that will reach 36 per cent by 2050 (Figure 4). The pace and scale of ageing worldwide will be highly diverse, with the fastest transitions occurring in middle-income countries (Box 1).

There will be ever-growing diversity in the relative share of the young population. In countries with low fertility, the younger population will become relatively and absolutely more minor. This will lead to increasing dependency ratios,¹² assuming no changes in migration. In other parts of the world at earlier stages of the fertility transition, primarily in Africa, the young population will continue to multiply over the next several decades, with huge increases in both the school-age and working-age populations by 2050.

▶ FIGURE 3

Proportion of population aged 65 years and older, 2024

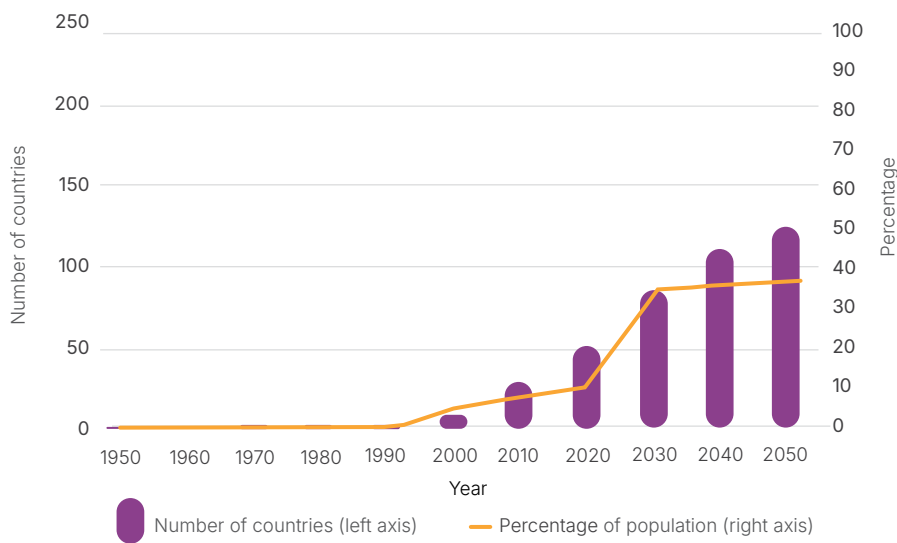


Source: UNFPA calculations based on data from UNDESA, Population Division 2024.

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

▶ FIGURE 4

Number of countries (left axis) and percentage of the global population living in a country with more older adults (65 and older) than children (under 15)



Source: UNFPA calculations based on data from UNDESA, Population Division 2024.

BOX 1

Adapting to population ageing to ensure well-being as we grow older

By E. Klien, HelpAge International

Population ageing is a global phenomenon with profound implications for societies and economies. It affects all groups of society but particularly older people as their share of the population increases sharply. For older people of today and the future, the challenges posed by population ageing are diverse, encompassing issues like poverty, inequality, entitlements and women's rights. This demographic shift necessitates strategic and holistic policy approaches, tailored to each context, to address the challenges and unlock the potential of an ageing population. A piecemeal sectoral approach is insufficient. Siloed interventions often fall short in meeting the multifaceted needs of older individuals and society as a whole. The cost of inaction will be high as the number of older people increases, creating risks of unsustainable pension systems, overwhelmed health-care services, a shortage of caregivers and intergenerational tensions.

To design effective strategies for adapting to population ageing, it is crucial to shift our perspective on old age. Older people should not be viewed as a burden but as providing tangible and intangible contributions to society. In the workforce, they bring crystallized abilities, knowledge, experience and wisdom to the table. Encouraging the active participation of older individuals in the labour market, along with their engagement in communities and families, can yield significant social and economic benefits. And our treatment of those who can no longer work reflects our cultural values and reinforces a societal promise of the rights and dignity that younger people can expect as they age. Ageing should be reframed as a natural and positive phase of life rather than a problem to be solved, and older ages should be defined not by years already lived but by years ahead.

Adaptation cannot take place if there is insufficient political will to design and implement coherent strategies. But how to build the necessary political will? Overcoming short-termism in policymaking is a must. Adaptation to population ageing necessitates a longer-term perspective and investments throughout the life course. And while evidence of best practices is increasing and can inform future planning, the availability of technical information is not the sole driver of political will. Policy changes have been influenced by a combination of factors, including a shared vision of a society that is fair for all generations, knowledge (know-how) gained from other adaptations, political opportunities often tied to electoral cycles, financial viability demonstrated through costing and feasibility studies, and demands from social movements. Advocating and seeking actionable political will requires an understanding of these determinants and broad alliances.

The challenges of population ageing demand systemic and holistic adaptations that transcend sectoral boundaries

Addressing the challenges of population ageing demands context-specific, systemic and holistic adaptations that transcend sectoral boundaries. A crucial component is rethinking old age, viewing ageing as an opportunity and older persons as valuable. It is only then that societies can harness the potential of their ageing populations and build a healthier, more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous future for all generations.

The uncertainties of migration

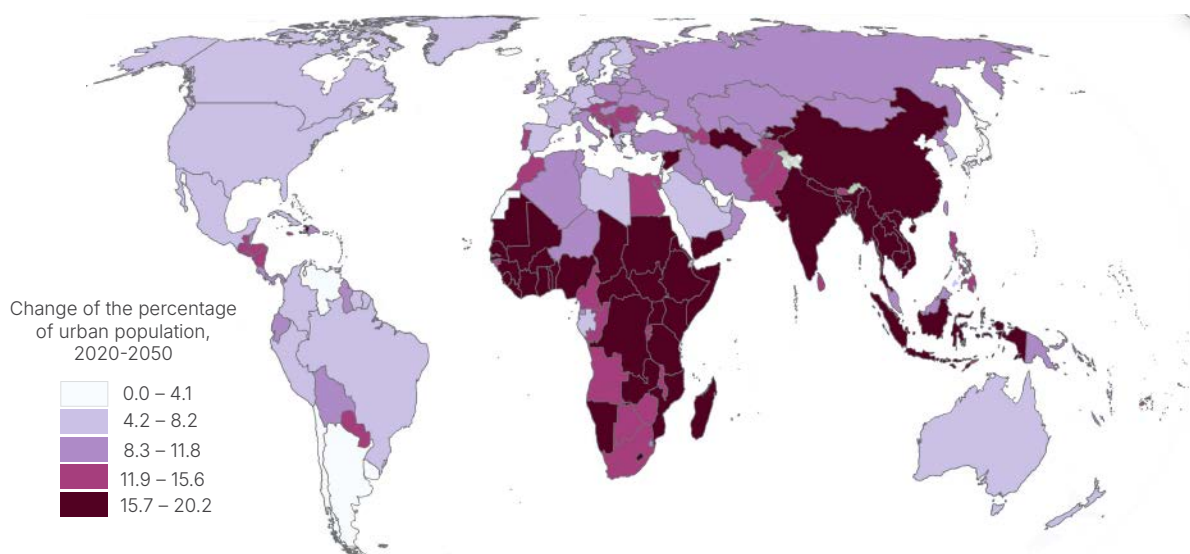
While we can be relatively confident of the future of fertility and mortality and their associated dynamics in population growth and age structure, we are much less certain about migration. Currently, international migration remains relatively stable globally but with extreme variations by country and region. Forced migration and displacement, meanwhile, are rising and have become acute in select countries and regions due to natural disasters or political conflict, violence or economic crises. The number of refugees around the world reached 36.4 million in 2023,¹³ the highest number recorded since World War II.

How will the relationship between the climate crisis and internal and/or international migration develop into the future?¹⁴ Will countries become more liberal or more restrictive in their migration policies? As older, richer cohorts grow, will retirement migration between countries become more significant, and will countries with ageing populations be compelled to open their borders to working-age migrants to sustain or grow their economies? All these dimensions are extremely uncertain and may undermine standard “certainties” regarding slow demographic change.¹⁵ Considering the megatrends that affect migration flows, including uneven economic development, climate change, natural disasters and conflicts, international migration is likely to accelerate (Box 2).¹⁶

In another dimension of demographic change, the global population will continue to urbanize. The pace and scale of urbanization vary greatly worldwide. It is slowing in Europe but increasing rapidly in less developed countries. Demographic projections of urbanization highlight the rapid pace anticipated in Africa and Asia (Figure 5). While megacities will continue to grow, most urban growth is projected to be in small and medium cities. Some of this growth comes from urban fertility, but it also reflects internal migration to urban areas, leaving some countries with rural ghost towns and underdevelopment, and greater impetus to more purposefully manage rural development.

▶ FIGURE 5

Projected increase in urbanization, 2020-2050



Source: UNFPA calculations based on data from UNDESA, Population Division 2018.

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

If we can predict many demographic trends with confidence, we can also predict many of the consequences. As rapid population growth will largely take place in the poorest countries, there will be continuing challenges to supporting the structural needs of fast-growing populations in terms of health care, education, housing and employment. Countries will face difficulties in sustaining tremendous recent gains in education¹⁷ and health,¹⁸ while expanding coverage to a larger population and increasing quality.

Population growth also makes it more complex to scale up interventions to end tragedies such as maternal mortality and child marriage, which are typically highest in the lowest-income countries.¹⁹ To illustrate this challenge, in Nigeria, despite progress in reducing the maternal mortality ratio from 1,123 to 1,047 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births between 2010 and 2020, rapid population growth is increasing the numbers of births and the absolute number of women dying in childbirth. The annual reduction in the maternal mortality rate would need to accelerate 1.7 times to reduce the absolute number of maternal deaths by 2030.

In this regard, population pressures are very tangible for governments trying to improve the health and well-being of their populations. In different ways, population ageing will also pressure pre-existing social and economic systems and demand new ones.

BOX 2

The future of international migration

By D. S. Massey, Princeton University

The modern world has witnessed three eras of mass migration. The first was the transatlantic slave trade from 1500 to 1880, when some 12 million people were forcibly extracted from Africa for enslaved labour in mercantile outposts scattered throughout Europe's various colonial empires. The second era unfolded between 1800 and 1914, as some 54 million people left the industrializing nations of Europe for European settler nations in Oceania and the Americas. The third era emerged in the 1970s and flowered during the 1980s, with the shift to a post-industrial service economy. In 1979, China moved to a market economy and in 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, creating the first truly global market economy.

From 1990 to 2008, total world product increased five times and foreign trade nearly tripled. At the same time, the global stock of immigrants rose by 37 per cent while the global population of refugees fell by 23 per cent. The global economy appeared to be stable in the 1990s. Optimists projected the global economy to grow steadily richer and freer as barriers to the international mobility of goods, services, information, capital and people fell.

As the twenty-first century progressed, however, populist opposition to globalization increased. Nationalist

As the twenty-first century progressed, populist opposition to globalization increased



autocracy spread, economic growth slowed and the volume of foreign trade shrank. Although global migration continued to rise, those moving were increasingly seeking to escape threats rather than to access opportunities. Whereas the global stock of refugees fell by an annual average of 384,000 persons per year from 1990 to 2008, the number rose by an average of 848,000 persons per year from 2008 to 2020.

Between 2008 and 2020, the number of asylum seekers rose by 280,000 persons per year, and the number of persons of concern to The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or in need of international protection rose by an average of 3.6 million per year. In the years since 2020, these numbers have only continued to increase, and as of 2022, the total number of persons monitored by UNHCR stood at 32 million, compared with just 10.5 million in 2008.

The growth in forced migration around the world ultimately stems from a series of structural deficiencies in the global market system that belie optimistic predictions, yielding very different and more chaotic cross-border flows of people. The first deficiency is that globalization is powered overwhelmingly by the burning of fossil fuels, which increases the frequency and severity of weather events that not only displace people directly but also generate migrants indirectly by putting pressure on social, economic and political institutions. A second vulnerability is that globalization assumes a stable collection of nation States, overlooking the potential for violence and disruption in the digital age caused by non-state actors, which generate more migrants. A third structural deficiency is that globalization has been disproportionately funded by debt, leading to a series of asset bubbles and liquidity crises that have undermined economic security not so much for the rich as for the larger population of poor, marginalized individuals in low- and middle-income countries. Debt-fuelled globalization has also increased economic insecurity among the middle and working classes in high-income countries.

Rising economic vulnerability during times of rapid and growing immigration push the politics of wealthier nations towards xenophobia, populism and opposition to the policies needed to accommodate rising inflows of migrants who seek relief from the deterioration of conditions in low- and middle-income countries. Current circumstances thus predict a rising outflow of forced migrants into a world that is ill-prepared to integrate them. A growing number of "illegal" migrants seeking to escape threats rather than access opportunities creates difficult political dilemmas for policymakers in wealthier countries, generating incentives for them to fall back on populist appeals to ethnic, racial and national identities, and leading to policies of restriction that contribute to humanitarian crises.

People seeking to escape threats to material well-being and survival are only doing what comes naturally to human beings: They move in search of a safer and more secure



A growing number of "illegal" migrants seeking to escape threats rather than access opportunities creates difficult political dilemmas



environment. They are unlikely to be deterred by restrictive policies and militarized borders, which do not address underlying problems and only exacerbate the world's ongoing humanitarian crisis. Anti-immigrant policies paradoxically prevail even though wealthier nations need international migrants to support rapidly ageing populations and forestall demographic decline. Although international law obliges each country to recognize a right to emigration, it compels no nation to respect a corresponding right to immigration.

To address the world's cascading migration crisis, which is a humanitarian and not a security crisis, political leaders in high-income countries must undertake a radical shift away from immigration policies focused on the suppression and deterrence of migrants to policies that seek to admit and integrate migrants humanely, however they arrive. Such a regime would accept the reality of international migration as an inextricable component of contemporary globalism that will likely increase in volume owing to the manifold effects of climate change and growing inequality.

Rather than viewing migrants as a menace, the rational alternative is to recognize them as a resource to be embraced and managed for the benefit of society

Rather than viewing migrants as a menace to be suppressed and removed, the rational alternative is to recognize them as a resource to be embraced and managed for the benefit of society. Although migrants may arrive with pressing humanitarian needs, they are also potential workers eager to apply their labour and invest their human capital in return for a haven for themselves and their families. A blueprint for such an immigration policy regime is laid out in 23 concrete objectives listed in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2018. Unfortunately, several key high-income countries either opposed or abstained from voting for the compact, and many countries signed it but are doing little to implement its provisions.

The compact lays out a long-term strategy to circumvent a global humanitarian crisis fomented by the rise of forced migration throughout the world. In the short term, leaders of multilateral organizations and citizens of non-signatory nations must keep up the pressure on recalcitrant governments to sign the compact and urge all governments to move forward vigorously in realizing its objectives. Policymakers must work to broaden the eligibility criteria and increase the numbers of people able to enter as asylees and refugees. Those admitted in such statuses must have the legal right not just to live but to work in their host communities, and should be offered a realistic and timely pathway to legal permanent residence and access to the same social services as native citizens. Although these reforms may appear difficult to sell politically to native voters, politicians can draw on abundant evidence indicating that they will ultimately serve to benefit immigrants and citizens alike, and create a stronger and more resilient social order for all.

The climate crisis and population dynamics

In a demographically diverse world, another megatrend accelerating changes is the climate crisis (see the related paper in this series on the ICPD and climate action). Even with ongoing reforms, dependency on fossil fuels and high consumption will likely continue in wealthy countries while low-consumption countries experience the greatest vulnerability and impacts of the crisis. Even though mitigating climate change and minimizing its impacts is primarily shaped by changes in living standards and lifestyles, and best addressed through shifts towards sustainable consumption and development, the narrative of “overpopulation” will most likely continue to lay the blame for resource scarcity and environmental degradation at the door of those who, even if they bear the most children, generally have the lowest carbon footprint.²⁰ To reverse the climate crisis and realize common but differentiated responsibilities, it will be essential to avoid “population narratives”.

This can in part be achieved by showing that the link between population, climate change and living standards is often, at best, a caricature. While the world population doubled from 4 billion to 8 billion over the last 50 years, global extreme poverty was also significantly reduced, seemingly defeating Malthusian concerns over the Earth’s carrying capacity. Even so, the development model under which the global economy has been operating is not sustainable for the environment and has destroyed habitats and the livelihoods of millions of people who contributed little to the climate crisis. Taking climate action in a context of climate injustice should apply the core principles of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action, including universality and respect for the needs of future generations, and the critical needs to eradicate poverty, assure rights-based population policies, and change patterns of production and consumption (Box 3).²¹



BOX 3

Meeting the challenge of the climate crisis

By R. Hoffmann, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

The Paris Agreement adopted at the twenty-first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change set a goal to limit global warming to well below 2°C degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C. With global emissions reaching a new high of 36.8 gigatonnes in 2022, the world is not on track to achieve these targets. Without rapid decarbonization to net-zero emissions, the world might face a rise of 3°C and more in global warming by 2100 with potentially disastrous consequences. Across most world regions, the observed temperature rise has generally been more rapid than the global average due to greater temperature increases over land, with some areas warming more than twice as fast as the global average.

Climate vulnerability refers to the degree to which a system (such as a community or household) is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, the adverse impacts of climate change. Across the world, the burden falls disproportionately on the poor as well as marginalized communities who lack the necessary capacities and resources to adapt to climatic hazards and cope with resulting impacts.

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change warns that climate change is the single greatest global health threat facing the world in the twenty-first century, affecting people's health both directly (e.g., heat stress) and indirectly (e.g., wildfire impacts on air quality). Demographic processes play a pivotal role in understanding the current and future implications of climate change. Older individuals face increased vulnerability to climate change due to their greater susceptibility to extreme events (e.g., due to pre-existing health conditions or mobility limitations). Both geography and economic factors (e.g., the affordability of protective technologies) play an important role in shaping population exposures and vulnerabilities.

Marginalized and informal settlements face high risks due to their lack of basic services and protective infrastructures

As one of the world regions most severely affected by climate change (coupled with development challenges, insecurity and protracted conflicts), Africa, with its growing population, will be increasingly exposed and vulnerable to climate hazards. As urbanization increases in Africa and Asia, extreme climate events such as flooding or storms could have particularly severe consequences in urban settings, leading to major displacements. Marginalized and informal settlements face high risks due to their lack of basic services and protective infrastructures, and gaps in climate-resilient planning.

The impacts of the climate crisis on populations cannot be understood in isolation but have to be seen against the background of local socioeconomic and political contexts, and interacting demographic factors and processes. Climatic risks are closely related to non-climatic risk factors, including economic, sociopolitical and health risks. The simultaneous occurrence or accumulation of multiple risks and related impacts over



time can lead to a (poly-)crisis situation that transcends the coping and adaptation capacities of local communities and households. Shocks in one area can spill over into others, leading to a domino effect of disruptions and challenges across various sectors and regions. In this context, researchers have warned that with increasingly severe climate change impacts, “limits to adaptation” and “habitability thresholds” may be reached – in other words, boundaries beyond which in situ adaptation and survival are no longer possible or severely threatened, forcing people to leave their homes or remain immobile in highly precarious and hazardous environments. The multiple interconnected challenges related to climate change require integrated solutions and a forward-looking perspective.

Demographic considerations and a forward-looking perspective are key: Projecting where people will live and what characteristics they will share is essential for protection and planning

Urgent political actions are needed to achieve the goals set by the Paris Agreement and to limit global warming. International collaboration is essential for sharing technological advancements and supporting low-income nations in their transition to cleaner energy sources. In addition to mitigation efforts, robust adaptation strategies are needed to protect populations worldwide from the already occurring impacts of climate change. These strategies should focus on reducing disparities and promoting social equity. Demographic considerations and a forward-looking perspective are key: Projecting where people will live and what characteristics they will share is essential for protection and planning. Addressing and compensating for incurred losses and damages constitute crucial components of just climate policy, recognizing that those most severely impacted by the climate crisis are often those who have contributed the least to its causes.

Improving climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts can bring about a positive future for the world, offering a range of co-benefits across various sectors, including health, well-being and people's connection with nature. Efforts to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions often involve transitioning to cleaner energy sources and reducing pollution, which leads to overall better health. Likewise, moving to climate-friendly diets and forms of mobility can also produce positive health effects. By promoting sustainability, including through more green spaces, sustainable transportation and eco-friendly urban planning, it is possible to enhance the overall well-being, mental health and social cohesion of communities. In addition, a green transition can create novel economic opportunities and spark innovation, contributing to sustainable economic growth and more resilient communities.

A green transition creates novel economic opportunities and sparks innovation, contributing to sustainable economic growth and resilient communities

3 | Population Anxieties and Policies

Virtually nothing in the social sciences can be projected with such a great degree of confidence, for so many decades in advance, as demographic change. Decades ago, countries had the data to know that their populations would be ageing, for instance. There is no reason for population ageing to come as a surprise today. Countries could have, and should have, anticipated population ageing to prepare the infrastructure, institutions and social systems for a much older population. The failure to do so, which is largely attributable to a mismatch in the time horizons of politicians and policymakers versus the slow pace of demographic change, means that population ageing is sometimes perceived as a “new population bomb”. But nothing is intrinsically sudden and explosive about it, except that it has been ignored for too long.

Today, it is critical not to repeat failures to anticipate and plan for demographic change. Countries should make greater efforts to use population data and projections for planning and preparing for the future. The exception relates to international migration, which as noted will most likely play a greater role in population projections than in the past. This will bring greater uncertainty.

Today’s development concerns include the dual challenge of raising living standards and diminishing inequalities, on the one hand, and reducing environmental stress and the climate crisis, on the other hand. Failure on either account is not an option. A failure to raise living standards will cause poverty, displacement, conflict and mass migration; a failure to ensure environmental sustainability will have similar and more global effects. These dual challenges can only be met by promoting a shift towards more sustainable consumption and production, as underscored in the Rio Declaration of 1992 as well as the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994.

There is growing realization that demographic change greatly matters for sustainable development. The SDGs cannot be achieved if development policies are not tailored to distinct demographic diversities. Thirty years ago, when the ICPD Programme of Action was penned, the focus was on population growth and its implications. Today, challenges associated with rapid population growth continue in some countries, but these are now joined by a distinct set of anxieties among countries facing slow, no, or negative population growth, and growing worries over immigration.

While concerns about “population numbers” are still common, the nature of these concerns is now diverging more than ever. Countries still at an early stage of the demographic transition are focused on how they can meet the needs of a rapidly growing population amid high levels of poverty, growing inequality, the inability to address socioeconomic needs and provide decent employment, and concerns about emigration further hampering economic growth and development. Countries at an advanced stage of the demographic transition worry that a shrinking working-age population will undermine social and economic progress. Many anxieties are real and important, yet some are exaggerated and outright misguided. Population numbers alone rarely pose challenges. In most cases, adequate policy responses need not focus on population numbers at all.

Two of the greatest worries at the moment are population stagnation and ageing, and rapid population growth with large young populations. Population ageing comes about through low fertility, improved life expectancy (and, in some countries, emigration), and is widely seen as a drag

on social and economic development. Having fewer people in the labour market who are paying taxes and more people drawing pensions and requiring care in older age has a net effect on the sustainability of health and social welfare systems without proportionate increases in productivity, technological substitution or the use of automation and robotics. The growing prevalence of long-term chronic and complex diseases, where greater proportions of increasing life expectancy are spent in poor health, can exacerbate imbalances. Granddaughters, daughters and older women find their opportunities curtailed due to uneven expectations around who should care for older persons. Against this backdrop, fear and anxiety surrounding ageing and stagnation kick in. Concerns over the future develop, a culture of ethno-nationalism emerges, and “quick fix” policies are implemented. Such policies might include encouraging women to have more children, raising the pension age and/or other pursuing fiscal reforms.

In the other scenario, parts of the world are still characterized by rapid population growth, with a large youthful population. This demographic narrative may have more extensive roots than the ageing/decline story. On the one hand, it is grounded in a simplistic (almost Malthusian) view of the relationship between people, resources and, ultimately, environmental degradation. On the other hand, many scholars have argued that rapid population growth, particularly large youthful populations, can be a precursor to political instability and security issues, although these stem as much from the lack of decent employment as from demographic circumstances. High-fertility anxieties and the top-down policies that responded to them were primary drivers of the global demand for a paradigm shift from population targets to the promotion of individual rights and choices at the ICPD in 1994.

In the first stages of population ageing, when lower fertility rates bring about a disproportionately large working-age population, economic growth can accelerate to deliver a *demographic dividend*. Favourable demographic conditions can be “turbo-charged” when the working-age population is healthy, educated, skilled and engaged in decent, productive employment; as such populations get older, they also tend to be richer, healthier and more highly skilled.²² If such countries also build an inclusive labour market, drawing on the full potential of women, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, this helps to further realize the potential of a demographic dividend.²³ Ensuring good governance and investing in health, particularly the sexual and reproductive health of young people; education and skills; social protection and poverty reduction; and paths to non-discrimination and greater equality across the life cycle are engines for maximizing demographic dividends. High savings rates over the life course can lead to a *second demographic dividend* when older populations invest their savings and time in the human capital of younger generations.

An inclusive, life-cycle perspective helps wealthier countries with older populations view ageing not as a problem but as an inevitable process of structural transformation that every country in the world will pass through, at a greater or lesser pace. The world may be diverse regarding the pace and scale of population ageing, but the fundamental principles and processes are the same. All countries still in the early stages of ageing can reap the benefits of demographic dividends. Countries in a more advanced stage can still pursue growth and sustainability and even a second demographic dividend.

In older countries, there appears to be a strong focus on labour market engagement among older persons. Yet there are often (even usually) high and rising rates of youth unemployment and



persistently low female labour force participation.²⁴ In rapidly growing countries, the size of the younger population may be less important in predicting instability than the extent to which that young population is listened to and given opportunities to work, flourish and be secure.²⁵ The voices of older persons, especially older females, in “young” countries are often highly marginalized, in part because they simply comprise a *relatively* small part of the population. This is especially true in lower- and middle-income countries where population ageing is progressing rapidly but the share of older persons remains relatively small.

From this angle, policies stop being about how to “fix populations” demographically and become about how to *enable* the best possible prospects for all people (the young, people of working age and older people), with considered attention to the current age structure and how it will change in the future. The successes of people and populations at every stage of their lives become a bellwether of the success of policies and choices to help every individual, young and old, to achieve their full potential. This is the second principle of the ICPD Programme of Action. In other words, rather than being considered only a narrow motor of economic development or national vitality, demographic change represents a lens to examine progress towards a better future for all.

Of 169 SDG targets, 107 are population-based, and their estimation and progress metrics are directly affected by whether populations grow, shrink or move. This shows how embedded and synergistic demographic change is to the development agenda in the broadest possible terms. And, of course, there are feedback mechanisms, as development outcomes affect demographic change. In this vein, rather than being a series of relentless “population challenges” to tackle, inciting fear and anxiety along the way, demographic change and diversity should be regarded as simply part of our shared human existence. When we go beyond numbers and look at the lived experience of humanity, we see how much of our future can be shaped for better or worse.

4 | Pathways to a Sustainable Future: The Relevance of the ICPD

The core ICPD principle is to focus on people as individuals rather than aggregated numbers. Various future scenarios are possible, some pointing to a more equal, sustainable and resilient world. Others lead to a more unequal, less habitable and dystopian world. As noted, there is great diversity in how the megatrends are unfolding worldwide, as they interact with diverse populations, characterized by different median ages, geographies and degrees of wealth. Can we promote a better future in light of both demographic diversity and megatrends – and remain guided by the vision, values and agreed actions of the ICPD Programme of Action?

Recent population policies that have sought to find “demographic solutions to demographic problems” are not working, precisely because they neither address the complexity of the “problems” nor the underlying drivers of demographic change that they aim to manipulate.²⁶ In this sense, the era of top-down, target-driven population policy should be over. It is useful to reflect on the conditions that enabled demographic dividends where they have already been achieved. The sum of individuals accumulating knowledge and capacity; experiencing a lifetime of good health, education and decent work; and supported by a strong economy is what fully maximizes the demographic dividend and makes people, communities and societies resilient to demographic change. This, at the most basic level, is the application of the ICPD principle of putting human beings at the heart of development.

Population policies and the ICPD Programme of Action: strengthening resilience

At every stage in life, policies and interventions can enable people, as the motors of development, to better fulfil their potential. This first requires a reinvention of what we mean by population policies, moving away from top-down demographic control to rights-based, human-centred policies that harness the potential of population change.

The fifth ICPD principle is that “population-related goals and policies are integral parts of cultural, economic and social development, the principal aim of which is to improve the quality and life of all people”. Under these auspices, development policies involve thinking way beyond a narrow, twentieth-century paradigm of population policy based on numbers and adopting a holistic view that tailors policies to distinct demographic diversities, and encompasses projected needs in education, health, housing, labour, etc. Greater attention to projected needs sharpens the assurance that “no one is left behind” by clarifying the profile of social vulnerabilities, whether influenced by geographical factors such as residing in remote regions or by racial and ethnic inequalities. It also entails recognizing the reality of intersectionality.

In this alternative future, targeted investments in early education, childcare, school facilities and teacher training; better alignment of school curricula to the labour market; and a society that values vocational education would give school graduates far more options.²⁷

With age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education²⁸ linked to sexual and reproductive health services and bolstered by family planning and supportive family policies, more people can achieve their desired family size. Diverse models of paid parental leave, flexible work policies, affordable housing and family support would reduce concerns among parents that having a family will hinder career progression. Work-life balance could be mainstreamed as a mutual good for both industry and workers, and help respond to the growing demand to combine employment with elder care.

Enhanced labour market policies would foster inclusion through expanding openings to underrepresented population groups, and facilitating formal employment opportunities for everyone who wants them and is capable of working.²⁹ A culture of lifelong learning and reskilling would make workers resilient to life-course changes in the home and workplace; many who would have reluctantly emigrated may instead choose to stay. For those who migrate, their contribution to the host society would be recognized and dignified.

The highest-quality people-centred health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, and health education would be mainstreamed and accessible to all, regardless of location, income and sexual orientation, from the earliest to the oldest ages. Enough high-quality, nutritious food would be produced globally, and made available and affordable to all. This would maximize health and longevity and enable healthy ageing, reducing dependency and chronic long-term illness.



Societal engagement and social protection throughout the life cycle, including in older age, would mean going beyond simply retrenching social systems. Instead, communities would become “age-friendly” through innovative infrastructure, transport, housing and social inclusion.³⁰ A continuum of care would be provided, with support given across all stages of life, enabling people to age in place for as long as possible but with adequate care.

Adapting to other megatrends would go hand in hand with this more positive future. Consumer behaviour would change; adaptation, mitigation and resilience to the climate crisis would accelerate; and the rise in global temperature would be halted. People would not be forced to move because their home regions are barely habitable. Green jobs would provide more employment opportunities. People would consume more sustainably and by choice through better knowledge and opportunities. Technology and artificial intelligence would be human-centred and focused on developing a better future for all. Developments in technology would be inclusive, and the digital divide would be closed, further enabling all people to harness the power of these new tools. Connectivity would improve for all so that remoteness, age and income are not barriers. Telemedicine and distance learning programmes would bring new opportunities for enhancing human capital. Gerontechnology and other human-centred technological innovations would enable healthy ageing and better living.

5 | Reflections and Recommendations: Policies for Population Well-Being

Demographic change is inevitable. Policymakers who anticipate change and are aware of demographic diversity can shape a future where the population is safe, healthy, skilled and resilient to disruption (Figure 6). Societies not only reap the benefits of the demographic dividend(s) but also, through investments in lifelong good health and ageing, keep the “demographic window of opportunity” open longer.

To enact needed policies, policymakers need wide political support. Harnessing demographic diversity demands inclusive policies that build on the second and fifth principles of the ICPD, releasing potential and maximizing well-being to enable all people to fully contribute to development.

Demographic change can bring many opportunities if governments, civil society and the private sector routinely use demographic data, evidence and population projections, including at subnational levels, to plan and adapt institutions, infrastructure, policies and services. Sex-disaggregated data and analysis can guide policies to meet the varying and unique needs of young people. These will differ by country, but sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, quality education and decent work are essential to all.

What is the place for policy in releasing human potential and maximizing well-being? Instead of imposing fertility targets to increase or decrease the number of children born, governments are encouraged to address factors limiting people’s chances to have the number of children they

► **FIGURE 6**

Policies for population well-being



Societies resilient to demographic change

Prioritize human development, respect all human rights and ensure equal opportunities for everyone to reach their full potential across all aspects of life. These policies can build societies resilient to demographic change, reap the benefits of the demographic dividend and harness the true power of humanity.

desire. Politics and the economy, the realization of reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, and access to care and support, including reliable sexual and reproductive health services, all factor greatly into a person's capacity to avoid unplanned pregnancies or have a desired number of children. Holistic population policies respond to local needs; assure access to both contraception and infertility services; uphold universal access to maternal, child and lifelong health; support gender equality and promote reproductive rights and choices.

In this paper, we set out a bold vision of how people's future can be different. Yet this vision is the ICPD vision set out 30 years ago! With a vast majority of SDG targets capturing objectives of the ICPD, **accelerating progress towards the global goals can, and should, be a primary tool to translate ICPD principles into reality and a better future for all. The SDGs cannot be achieved if policies are not tailored to distinct demographic diversities.**

All countries will benefit if they invest in their youth and strengthen human capital. Young people will power productive economies, address the climate crisis throughout their lives and harness the tech revolution. While the benefits of investment in young people are universal, they are especially urgent for countries with large youthful populations, and countries that are losing young people to out-migration. Research with youth should define local needs.

Countries are advised to prepare for older populations. Active and healthy ageing does not start with the actions people take when they turn 60 but is shaped by investment in people's health from their earliest years and throughout their lives. This includes, but goes beyond, reforms of pension systems, health insurance and the health-care system. While promoting labour market engagement for older persons, governments can also adopt enabling policies for labour force participation among women, migrants, the poor and those with disabilities. More global dialogue and exchanges among countries at different stages of ageing can provide a good platform for sharing the most impactful and promising policies.

Strengthening the care economy is critical for healthy ageing. This ideally takes place alongside urban and residential planning and housing policies that safely maintain the independence of older persons in "age-friendly" communities. Planning for an ageing society should happen well in advance; even countries with large shares of young people are encouraged to start preparing for an older society.

Investment in the care economy and gender-responsive family policies recognizes that everyone benefits from universal support for the care of children and older persons. Care should not depend mainly on the unpaid work of female family members. All care workers should have fair pay and decent working conditions. To enable families to have the children they desire, governments could invest in high-quality and affordable childcare for children of all ages, aligned with the working hours of parents.

Many countries can seize the opportunity to "get urban development right". Significant experience has accumulated on how to design liveable, vibrant, human-centric cities. Governments could adopt urban designs that improve health outcomes, promote community life, protect the security of diverse populations, are affordable for young people, and reduce carbon footprints and urban heat island effects.

Leaders are encouraged to accept the reality of international migration in a globalized and unequal world and the likelihood that it will increase due to climate and humanitarian crises and economic inequality. Governments could sign the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and realize its objectives. Political leaders in recipient countries may benefit if they shift from restrictive immigration politics to policies that secure safe, orderly and regular migration, given the mutual social and economic benefits for migrants and host societies alike. All countries could take steps to integrate migrants humanely, with no discrimination, and regardless of their origin and status.

Placing humans at the centre of concerns for human development, respecting all individual human rights and giving everyone opportunities to make the most of their potential, in all areas of their lives, will build societies resilient to demographic change and harness the true power of humanity. In short, we can and must turn demographic headwinds into tailwinds.

6 | Conclusion

- ▶ In highlighting key findings and recommended actions on demographic change and sustainability, this think piece has shown that fertility targets and incentives are blunt instruments. Governments can better support individuals and families if they focus on mitigating factors that limit people's choices to have the number of children they desire, investing in human capital and preparing for their demographic future.
- ▶ For healthy ageing and a family-friendly society, there is a widespread need to strengthen the care economy, recognizing that everyone benefits when there is support for the care of children and older persons, and this important work cannot rely on women's unpaid labour.
- ▶ Finally, international migration is inevitable in a globalized and unequal world. There is a high likelihood that it will increase in coming years due to climate and humanitarian crises and economic inequality. Demographic diversity offers countries an opportunity to reconsider the potential of safe and orderly international migration as a pathway to sustainable development.



References

- Billari, Francesco C., 2022. "Demography, Fast and Slow." *Population and Development Review* 48(1): 9–30.
- Chancel, Lucas, 2020. *Unsustainable Inequalities: Social Justice and the Environment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chancel, Lucas, and others, 2023. *Climate Inequality Report 2023: Fair Taxes for a Sustainable Future in the Global South*. World Inequality Lab Study 2023. Website: wid.world/document/climate-inequality-report-2023, accessed 5 April 2024.
- EuroStat, 2023. "Total Fertility Rate." Website: ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00199/default/table?lang=en, accessed 5 April 2024.
- ILO (International Labour Organization), 2021. *Decent Jobs for Youth Impact Report 2021*. Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth. Geneva: ILO.
- ILO (International Labour Organization), undated. "Decent Jobs for Youth." Website: www.decentjobsforyouth.org/#latest, accessed 5 April 2024.
- Lutz, Wolfgang, 2013. "Demographic Metabolism: A Predictive Theory of Socioeconomic Change." *Population and Development Review* 38 (s1): 283–301.
- Scott, Linda. 2020. *The Double X Economy: The Epic Potential of Women's Empowerment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sobotka, Tomás, and others, 2019. "Policy Responses to Low Fertility: How Effective Are They?" Technical Division Working Paper No. 1. New York: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- UN IGME (United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Child Mortality Estimation), 2022. *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), 1995. *Population and Development: Programme of Action Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 5-13 September 1994*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), Population Division, 2018. *World Urbanization Prospects 2018*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), Population Division, 2022. *World Population Prospects 2022*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), Population Division, 2023. *World of Population Ageing 2023: Challenges and Opportunities of Population Ageing in the Least Developed Countries*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), Population Division, 2024. *World Population Prospects 2024*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDRR (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019. "Massive Displacement, Greater Competition for Scarce Resources Cited as Major Risks in Security Council Debate on Climate-related Risks." Prevention Web News, 25 January. Website: www.preventionweb.net/news/massive-displacement-greater-competition-scarce-resources-cited-major-risks-security-council, accessed 5 April 2024.

- UNECLAC (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), 2022. *Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: Inclusion and Rights of Older Persons*. Santiago: UNECLAC.
- UNECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council), 2023a. "Population, Education and Sustainable Development: Report of the Secretary General." 26 January. E/CN.9/2023/2.
- UNECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council), 2023b. "Review of Programmes and Interventions for the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Context of Population, Education and Sustainable Development: Report of the Secretary-General." 27 January. E/CN.9/2023/3.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), 2021. *The Journey towards Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Global Status Report*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), 2023. *State of World Population 2023: 8 Billion Lives, Infinite Possibilities – The Case for Rights and Choices*. New York: UNFPA
- UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency), 2023. "Data and Statistics: Mid-Year Trends." Website: www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends, accessed 5 April 2024.
- United Nations, 2020. *Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations, 2022. "About the 2022 Transforming Education Summit." Website: www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/about, accessed 5 April 2024.
- WHO (World Health Organization), 2022. "Healthy Life Expectancy in Africa Rises by Almost Ten Years." *African Renewal*, 4 August. Website: www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2022/healthy-life-expectancy-africa-rises-almost-ten-years, accessed 5 April 2024.
- WHO (World Health Organization) and others, 2023. *Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000-2020: Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division*. Geneva: WHO.
- World Bank, 2022. "Nearly 2.4 Million Women Globally Don't Have Same Economic Rights as Men." Press Release, 1 March. Website: www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men, accessed 5 April 2024.
- Xu Chi and others, 2020. "Future of the Human Climate Niche." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117(21): 11350–11355.

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations 2023.
- 2 UNDESA 1995.
- 3 UNDESA, Population Division 2023.
- 4 UNFPA 2023.
- 5 UNDESA, Population Division 2024.
- 6 EuroStat 2023.
- 7 UN IGME 2022.
- 8 UNDESA, Population Division 2024.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 UNDESA, Population Division 2023.
- 11 UNDESA, Population Division 2024.
- 12 The dependency ratio is the ratio of the non-working population (younger and older dependents) to the working-age population.
- 13 UNHCR 2023.
- 14 UNDRR 2019.
- 15 Billari 2022.
- 16 Xu and others 2020.
- 17 The Secretary-General's reports for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development (2023) include summaries of educational gains across the world since 1994. See UNECOSOC 2023a, 2023b.
- 18 WHO 2022.
- 19 WHO and others 2023.
- 20 Chancel 2020; Chancel and others 2023, p. 19.
- 21 UNDESA 1995, Principles, pp. 9-11.
- 22 Lutz 2013.
- 23 Scott 2020.
- 24 World Bank 2022.
- 25 ILO 2021.
- 26 Sobotka and others 2019.
- 27 United Nations 2022.
- 28 UNESCO 2021.
- 29 UNECLAC 2022.
- 30 UNDESA, Population Division 2023.





United Nations Population Fund
605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158
Tel. +1 212-297-5000
www.unfpa.org
X@UNFPA

