

## Is demography a real problem for sustainability?

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**Abstract:** The impact of a growing population on the environment has been a focus of interest for many years. This is because of the well-known links between more people on the planet, growing wealth and consumption, and increasing environmental degradation. However, less attention has been paid to the environmental impacts of a stagnant and possibly shrinking population. The relationship between demographics and sustainability is fraught with significant contradictions. It appears that growth is critical to the planet because population is a major cause of environmentally damaging emissions, impacts, or resource use. However, halting population growth would accelerate population ageing, resulting in a decline in the labour force and an increase in the proportion of economically dependent people. Shifts in population trends have multiple impacts on the environment, but their nature and effects are often misunderstood or oversimplified, leading to population dynamics being ignored in both intergovernmental negotiations and adaptation to these changes.

Demographic change, with its global megatrends of migration and population ageing, as well as numerous health issues, has significant implications for the transition to sustainability and challenges its human, technological, economic, social, and political elements. In discussions of mobility impacts, environmentally induced migration is sometimes viewed as a failure to adapt to environmental degradation that has resulted

in large numbers of displaced people. However, the reality is much more complex. An alternative view presents migration as an important adaptation strategy. Population ageing is thought to have a direct impact on the environment by leading to changes in consumption levels and patterns, resulting in a reduction in certain environmental pressures. The impact of an ageing population on labour markets, as well as the negative consequences for fiscal balances, can affect public and private budgets, which in turn can influence policy and discourage investment. Therefore, more accurate information is needed to dispel misconceptions (growth paranoia, Anthropocene, etc.) that often underlie the population-development nexus and to formulate policies that lead to a transition to sustainable societies.

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