



## Population growth, environmental degradation and climate change

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More than a third of 50 [recently surveyed](#) Nobel laureates cited “population rise / environmental degradation” as the biggest threat to humankind. Second on the list was “nuclear war”, cited by 23 per cent of the laureates, while no other issue was selected by more than 10 per cent of respondents.

Are the survey responses of the Nobelists an accurate assessment of the relative importance of the threats facing humanity? And why were population increase and environmental damage bundled together in the survey, rather than being treated as separate issues?

A new report on population growth and sustainable development from the Population Division of UN DESA revisits the complex relationships linking population increase to social and economic development and environmental change.

The human population has experienced a period of unprecedented growth, more than tripling in size since 1950. It reached almost 7.8 billion in 2020 and is projected to grow

to over 8.5 billion in 2030, the target date for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This growth is the result of two trends: on the one hand, the gradual increase in average human longevity due to widespread improvements in public health, nutrition, personal hygiene and medicine, and on the other hand, the persistence of high levels of fertility in many countries. But is growth of the human population responsible for the environmental catastrophe our planet is facing?

The data tell a different story. For example, although high-income and upper-middle-income countries contain around 50 per cent of the global population, they contribute around 85 per cent of global emissions of carbon dioxide. Such emissions from upper-middle-income countries have more than doubled since 2000, even though the population growth rate was falling throughout this period. Most high-income countries are growing slowly if at all, and for some the population has been decreasing.

Could measures to limit future population growth make a substantial contribution to mitigating climate change? A fundamental challenge is the slow pace at which population trends change. The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) underlines that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

Globally, population growth is slowing down and may come to a halt by around 2100, thanks to the smaller family sizes associated with social and economic development. However, given the intrinsic momentum of population growth, the range of plausible trajectories of global population over the next few decades is quite narrow. For this reason, further actions by Governments to limit the growth of populations would do little to mitigate the forces of climate change between now and 2050.

Instead of looking for solutions in demographic trends, achieving sustainability will depend critically on humanity's capacity and willingness to increase resource efficiency in consumption and production and to decouple economic growth from damage to the environment. High-income and upper-middle-income countries should acknowledge their disproportionate contributions to global environmental damage and take the lead in building a more sustainable economic system for the benefit of future generations.

At the same time, in many low-income and lower-middle-income countries today, rapid population growth remains a matter of concern, because it adds to the challenges of achieving social and economic development and of ensuring that no one is left behind. The continuing high levels of fertility that drive such growth are both a symptom and a cause of slow progress in development, often linked to a lack of choice and empowerment among women and girls.

Rapid population growth makes it more difficult for low-income and lower-middle-income countries to commit sufficient resources to improving the health and education of their populations. Rapid growth and the associated slow progress in development also diminish their capacity to respond and adapt to emerging environmental threats, including those caused by climate change.

Achieving the SDG targets related to reproductive health, education and gender equality will require empowering individuals, particularly women, to make choices about the number and timing of their children. The experience of countries from all regions suggests that such changes will facilitate, and could potentially accelerate, the anticipated slowdown in global population growth over the coming decades.

Learn more on the website of [UN DESA's Population Division](#).



## EXPERT VOICES



### Ending poverty and hunger once and for all – is it possible?

The COVID-19 crisis has led to the first rise in extreme poverty and food insecurity in 20 years. Is it realistic to end these two scourges once and for all? Ahead of the Commission for Social Development this month, we ask UN DESA's Wenyan Yang about this and what is needed to ensure that all people, everywhere, can live a healthy life in dignity.

**People have been suffering poverty and hunger for as long as our species exists. Is it realistic to end these two scourges once and for all?**

"It is true that poverty and hunger have long been the unfortunate part of the human condition. Today, productivity growth, technological progress and the productive capacity of our societies have reached levels unprecedented in human history. Yet there are still hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings living in extreme poverty and as many millions suffering from hunger.

The fact is that there is enough food produced and wealth generated to end these two scourges once and for all. It is a moral and ethical obligation and materially feasible task, although relative poverty and variations in nutritional status across populations may persist. What we need is the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development everywhere and for all people.

Much progress had been made in reducing the numbers of people mired in extreme poverty and hunger before the COVID-19 pandemic. There are examples of successful plans and innovative solutions that can inform strategies for an inclusive and resilient recovery from the pandemic to get back on track to achieve the SDGs."

**The COVID-19 pandemic has wiped out years, even decades of progress on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. What are countries doing to get back on track? Can you give us examples of some strategies that have been more successful than others?**

"The World Bank estimates that the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 pushed more than 97 million additional people into extreme poverty in 2020, and the number of people living in extreme poverty in 2021 is projected to be still greater than in 2019 despite a decline of 20 million compared to 2020. Between 720 and 811 million people faced hunger in 2020; 161 million more than in 2019. Setbacks would have been worse if not for the swift and large-scale emergency response measures countries took to protect people and their livelihoods. These measures provide lessons and the basis on which to implement strategies to get back on track to accelerate progress on the SDGs.

Expansion of social protection measures stood out as the most successful measure to reduce poverty and hunger. 18% of global stimulus packages were spent on social protection measures, with total spending increasing by almost 270% between December 2020 and May 2021, reaching \$2.9 trillion (or 3% of global GDP) in 2021. Countries provided COVID-19 cash transfers to poor families and families with children to ensure a

basic monthly family income; social protection benefits were raised, albeit often temporarily; and coverage of social protection programmes were extended to previously uncovered population groups.

Governments successfully leveraged digital technology to deliver needed public services and improve efficiency of public administration, while also enhancing investment in human capability and wellbeing. Costa Rica established a national emergency platform with education materials; Qatar launched a new online learning platform offering digital and interactive resources for students. Togo used machine learning, geospatial analytics, and mobile phone metadata during the pandemic to identify 57,000 new beneficiaries among vulnerable populations for prioritized contactless social protection payments.

Many countries rolled out targeted measures to support small businesses and the self-employed, and to provide incentives for companies to retain workers during the pandemic. For example, Brunei supported micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises through a dedicated on-line platform to market their goods and services during the pandemic; Lithuania gave hiring subsidies to employers for the creation of jobs for the most vulnerable persons, including persons with disabilities, older persons, young people, long-term or low-skilled unemployed; Namibia provided support to businesses through interest rates reduction, wage subsidies and negotiated debt repayment holidays, and credit support; South Africa increased the number of projects and hires, especially in essential services, under the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Governments also included support to the agricultural sector to combat hunger and food insecurity during the pandemic in their fiscal packages and implemented measures to promote food security and sustainable food systems. For example, Brazil's package includes debt restructuring assistance, lower interest rates for rural credit, and special credit lines to support family farmers, especially those in hard-hit sectors (e.g., dairy, floriculture, and aquaculture); Japan launched the "Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems 'MeaDRI'" in May 2021 to enhance both productivity and sustainability of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and food industries through innovation. Thailand fostered cooperation between private sector food producers and large-scale food retailers to boost food security and improved nutrition."

**The 60th Commission for Social Development is meeting this month. What are the main issues Member States, activists, scholars and other partners will discuss together? Can this forum bring about change?**

"The Commission for Social Development is the primary intergovernmental body responsible for following up on the World Social Summit and the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is a platform for engagement and experience-sharing for Member States and all social partners.

The 60th session will focus discussions and policy deliberations on poverty and hunger to enable an inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 and to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The social dimension of the New Partnership for Africa's Development is also in its work programme. A Ministerial Forum will engage participants in a discussion on strengthening multilateralism to deliver well-being and dignity for all by addressing food insecurity and poverty.

The Commission will make its contribution to the work of ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum. It will also provide guidance, from the social perspective and emphasizing policy integration and coherence, to national Governments in their efforts to recover from the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic and to get back on track to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for all. The objective of the Commission is to bring about change that will make a positive difference in people's lives. This can be accomplished when nationally-owned inclusive and sustainable development strategies that promote the wellbeing and dignity of all are supported and implemented."

Learn more and follow the work of the Commission for Social Development [here](#).



## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



### 4 ways you can shape the global agenda

The days of multilateralism as a closed club of governments are over. The UN is spearheading [a new approach to international cooperation](#) that is more networked, inclusive and effective in addressing the challenges of the 21st century. Here are 4 ways you can join in this effort and have your voice heard:

#### 1. Register for the ECOSOC Partnership Forum

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Partnership Forum on 2nd February will rally the UN Member States and an unprecedented variety of other stakeholders to exchange new ideas, expectations and priorities for the year ahead, including the annual High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). You can be one of them. [Register here.](#)

#### 2. Have your say

Under its new formula, the Partnership Forum has become a large-scale, global “consultative moment”, engaging all stakeholders to discuss the 2022 theme of the ECOSOC and HLPF, as well as forward-looking actions and innovative partnerships that can bring us closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This is the place to share your ideas and priorities for the year.

#### 3. Find your SDG partners

In addition to the formal opening, plenary and closing sessions, the new Forum will include parallel informal “Spotlight Sessions” organized by different partners around priority topics. The Forum will also feature a hands-on “Partnership Exchange” to share knowledge and expertise on multi-stakeholder partnerships. [See the full programme here.](#)

#### 4. Connect

Anyone interested in following the sessions can do so through an online event platform called [Whova](#). This user-friendly tool will provide an all-in-one access to all sessions of the Forum and networking opportunities. Formal sessions will also be webcast on [UN Web TV](#).

For more information about the Forum, go to the [ECOSOC Partnership Forum website](#). Register on the Whova event platform [here](#).

*Photo credit: Gato Mídia*







**SDG BLOG**



Collen Vixen Kelapile, President  
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## Partner with us for Partnership Forum 2022

*By Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)*

Partnerships mean different things to different people. To some, partnerships can mean sharing the financial burdens and profits of joint ventures. To others, partnerships may entail a deeper commitment to common objectives and working with others to find solutions to shared problems.

Today, more than ever, we need multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize and share the efforts, knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources needed to combat the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and ensure a resilient and sustainable recovery that is anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the face of the significant challenges imposed by the pandemic and the deep economic recession it has yielded, it is encouraging to see that the global community has stepped up its efforts to mobilize new partnerships from all stakeholders. The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed a growing number and scope of multi-stakeholder partnerships that address the various challenges brought by the pandemic, from developing vaccines and providing

urgent health and socio-economic responses, to supporting communities and working towards a post-pandemic sustainable recovery.

My own country, Botswana, managed to achieve breakthrough progress in addressing HIV/AIDS through partnerships, including with the scientific community and other actors. It is building on this experience that we can address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not only do we need to forge more partnerships to address and overcome common challenges, but we also need spaces for discussions and learning among all stakeholders, engaged or potentially engaged in partnerships, on how to employ and promote the SDGs as a framework for recovery efforts, integrating the principles of "leaving no one behind" and "whole-of-society" implementation and review.

Held annually, the Partnership Forum of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is an opportunity for Member States and a wide range of stakeholders to brainstorm with some of the world's most influential thinkers and actors about how we could engage and partner better in support of the SDGs. It also allows to exchange views and feedback for the upcoming work of both the ECOSOC and the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and related UN meetings.

The theme of the upcoming Partnership Forum on 2 February 2022 "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda" could not be timelier.

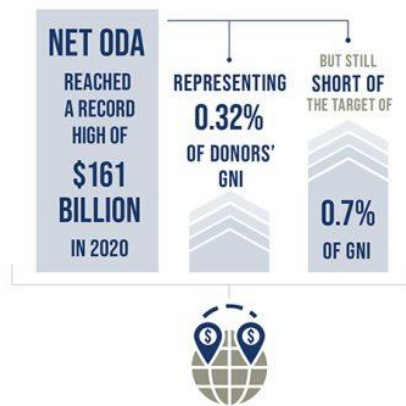
To prepare for the Partnership Forum in late 2021, UN DESA conducted an [open global online consultation](#) to compile views, experiences, and recommendations from all stakeholders. A recently published [report](#) summarizes the key messages. One such message is that the ECOSOC Partnership Forum should prioritize discussions around themes such as: the interconnectivity and cross-cutting nature of the SDGs, capacity building for partnership and mutual learning, support to vulnerable groups, especially those that are not reachable by modern communications means, quality education, vaccine equity and sustainable healthcare models and gender equality.

My hope is that the 2022 ECOSOC Partnership Forum will go beyond just bringing together governments and other key actors to share their relevant experiences and insights on these and other topics. My ambition is for us to co-create effective and inclusive multi-stakeholder collaboration that will have a lasting impact on the ground, where action is most direly needed. I would like to invite you to visit the [website of the 2022 ECOSOC Partnership Forum](#) to learn more about the event and join us at the 2022 ECOSOC Partnership Forum!

*\* The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



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