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UNFPA

Population Policies of Nations and Their Implications

EFFLMUN'25

UNFPA

STUDY GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.Letters from the Secretariat

2.Letters from the Academic Team

3.Letters from the Chairboard

4.Introduction

4.1. Introduction to the Committee

4.2. Introduction to the Agenda

5.Historical Background of the Committee

5.1.Establishment of UNFPA

5.2. World Population Conferences

5.3. Expansion of Mandate

5.4. Recent Milestone

5.5 Evolution of Countries Population Policies

6. Reproductive Health and Rights

6.1. Social Equality in Population Policies

6.2. Family Planning

6.3.Gender Inequalities

7.Population Data, Research and Policy

7.1. Issue Arising from Overpopulation and Underpopulation

7.2. Conducting National Censuses

7.3. Cultural Sensitivity and Ethical Considerations

7.4. Policies That Countries Can Implement

8. International Cooperation and UNFPA's Role

8.1. Strengthening Global Partnerships

9. Bibliography

1. Letters from the Secretariat

Dear delegates,

A warm welcome to EFFLMUN'25. We are truly delighted that you have chosen to spend your time with us, and we aim to make this decision one you'll look back on with absolute satisfaction.

This conference has been crafted with careful thought and unwavering dedication. I feel incredibly fortunate to have a role in shaping this event and to work alongside such talented individuals. The process demanded commitment, yet every step was rewarding because we always believed in the value of what we were building.

EFFLMUN'25 represents so much determination, passion, patience, and countless moments of collaboration that cannot be summed up easily. Above all, it was created to leave you with lasting, meaningful memories.

With great enthusiasm, we come together once more to celebrate dialogue, leadership, and the spirit of democracy. We cannot wait to offer you an exceptional and inspiring experience.

Güneş Uzun
Secretary-General
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Dear Delegates,

We made the EFFLMUN'25 with you in our hearts. We are happy that you joined us. Much thought and energy went into creating this gathering — but most importantly, it started with one idea: talking deeply always links people in unique manners. You picked to stay these days by our side; thus for every bit of time spent getting ready, it is valuable.

EFFLMUN'25 is far greater than the timetable of committees and sessions. It is a space where ideas converge, perspectives widen, and acquaintances happen to strike up. We wish that you are able to muster up enough confidence to speak out your thoughts, interest to look around, and ease just having fun being here.

As this conference kicks off, we want you to feel welcomed and supported as well as encouraged to take hold of any opportunity that comes your way. We are eager to see your drive, your leadership, and the individual marks each of you will make.

Ahmet Furkan Elden
Director General
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2.Letters from the Academic Team

Dear Delegates,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the conference. As the Academic Team, we have worked with great care to research, write and organise every topic you will see throughout this event. Our goal was to create material that is clear, reliable, informative, and inspires you to debate with confidence.

We believe MUN is at its best when delegates feel prepared, supported and their visions expanded. That's why we focused on building committees that not only tackle global issues but also spark curiosity and encourage deeper thinking. We hope our work helps you dive into your roles, challenge ideas, and enjoy the experience fully. If you have any questions before or during the conference, our team will be glad to assist you. We wish you meaningful discussions, bold diplomacy, and an unforgettable MUN experience.

The Academic Team

3.Letters from the Chairboard

Dear Delegates,

It is our honor to welcome you to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) at this year's conference. UNFPA is a unique and deeply humanitarian body within the United Nations system — one that works at human rights, health, and development. Unlike many UNFPA places, people are at the center. Its mission is to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. As delegates, you will be representing countries in discussions that directly affect the lives of millions: women, adolescents, families, and communities experiencing rapid demographic shifts.

Our agenda, "Population Policies of Nations and Their Local and Global Implications," captures one of the most important and complex challenges of our time. Around the world, states are navigating a delicate balance between supporting their populations and respecting the rights of individuals. Some nations face underpopulation and aging, while others struggle with extreme population growth, youth bulges, or pressures on health and education systems. These demographic trends influence everything — economic development, gender equality, access to reproductive healthcare, migration patterns, social stability, and long-term sustainability.

In this committee, you will be expected to analyze how these policies emerge, how they differ across regions, and most importantly, how they impact people's lives. Your task is not merely to debate statistics, but to understand the stories and vulnerabilities behind them. Properly addressing population change requires empathy, strategic thinking, and an awareness of UNFPA's guiding principles: voluntariness, non-discrimination, and the protection of human rights.

As you prepare for debate, we encourage you to approach this topic with curiosity and courage. Question assumptions, engage respectfully with your fellow delegates, and think critically about how global policy can empower real individuals, especially women and

young people, without imposing harmful practices. We believe that each of you has the potential to shape transformative and ethical solutions throughout this conference.

We look forward to guiding you through discussions that are as challenging as they are meaningful and watching this committee grow into a dynamic space of thoughtful dialogue and meaningful policy-making

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Under Secretary-General/President Chair

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Cansu Tekay

Vice-Chair

4.Introduction

4.1. Introduction to the Committee: Population Policies of Nations and Their Implications

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is a global organization dedicated to promoting reproductive health, gender equality, and population data management in over 150 countries. Established in 1969, UNFPA works to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person can reach their full potential. Guided by human rights principles, the organization addresses both the social and structural factors that shape population trends, while supporting countries in developing policies that empower individuals and promote sustainable development. At the core of its mission is the principle that population policies should respect human rights and empower individuals to make informed choices about their lives and families. UNFPA's approach to population issues developed significantly following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo. At this conference, global leaders emphasized that sustainable development cannot be achieved without protecting reproductive rights, promoting gender equality, and ensuring access to healthcare for all. This conference marked a major shift in how the world understands population issues: instead of just managing numbers, the focus became empowering people to make choices about their health, families, and futures.

UNFPA focuses on three main goals, known as the “three zeros”:

1. Zero unmet need for family planning, meaning that all individuals have assured access to safe, effective, and informed family planning services whenever they choose to use them.
2. Zero preventable pregnancy-related deaths, so that every pregnancy and childbirth is as safe as possible.

3. Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices, protecting people from violence and discrimination.

These goals guide UNFPA's work at both the national and community levels. The organization supports countries in making policies, training health workers, and running programs in local communities.

Population policies vary widely around the world. Some countries encourage people to have more children or attract migrants to address decreasing of employment, while others focus on managing rapid population growth and making sure all citizens have access to basic services such as education and healthcare. These differences show that population policies are not just technical solutions, they involve ethical, social, and economic choices. Policymakers must balance demographic goals with human rights, gender equality, and long-term sustainability to achieve fair outcomes.

Through its work, UNFPA has become a central actor in connecting population issues to sustainable development, demonstrating that investment in human health, education, and rights is essential for social and economic progress. Its programs combine humanistic response with long-term development goals, making it a unique agency that addresses immediate needs while planning for a better, more equitable future.

4.2. Introduction to the Agenda

Population dynamics influence every country, but the impact and the ability to respond vary widely. High-income countries often act as the main financial supporters of UNFPA. States such as Norway, Germany, Sweden, and the United States provide large and consistent contributions, allowing UNFPA to fund core programmes and respond quickly when new challenges arise. The European Union is also a major donor, supporting global efforts in reproductive health, gender equality, and humanitarian assistance.

Middle-income countries play a different but significant role. Many of them are experiencing rapid urbanization, shifting family structures, and changing fertility structure. Because of these changes, many of these countries become useful examples for developing new population policies and for guiding cooperation within their regions. Their experiences help UNFPA understand which strategies work in diverse social and economic settings.

Low-income and crisis-affected countries face the greatest needs. These states struggle with high rates of pregnancy-related deaths, limited access to family planning, and widespread gender-based violence. Weak health systems and ongoing conflicts make it difficult for them to manage demographic pressures. UNFPA supports these countries by improving healthcare services, strengthening data systems, and providing humanitarian aid when necessary.

In this committee, delegates will examine how different countries' economic situations shape their roles within UNFPA. High-income states contribute financially, middle-income states provide regional leadership and policy models, and low-income states require targeted support to protect vulnerable communities. Delegates should consider how international cooperation can reduce inequalities and help all countries work toward UNFPA's goals,

ensuring access to family planning, reducing preventable pregnancy-related deaths, and eliminating gender-based violence.

By understanding each country's responsibilities and challenges, delegates can propose balanced and realistic solutions. The agenda encourages policies that respect human rights, strengthen health systems, and promote sustainable development for all.

5. Historical Background of the Committee

5.1. Establishment of UNFPA

Since its starting point the United Nations has been involved in the field of population and UNFPA is the primary U.N. entity addressing population issues. Its overall goal is to ensure reproductive rights for all. Established in 1967 and began operations in 1969 as the response to growing global concern about demographic change and the promise of new family planning technologies; after four years, UNFPA was recognised as a permanent entity within the UN system, funded through voluntary contributions from Member States with expenses totaling \$1.29 billion in 2020. Eventually, the official name was changed to United Nations Population Fund, but the abbreviation UNFPA was retained. UNFPA now operates in over 150 countries and supports more than 3,000 staff.

5.2 World Population Conferences

The first World Population Conference was organized in Rome in 1954 to exchange scientific information on demographic variables, their determinants and their consequences. produce more comprehensive information on the demographic situation of developing countries and to promote the creation of regional training centers which would help to solve population problems and to prepare specialists in demographic analysis. The Second World Population Conference held in Belgrade in 1965 emphasized the analysis of fertility as part of development planning policy. In 1974, in Bucharest, the Third World Population Conference was organized. The World Population Plan of Action, born out of this conference, stipulates, among other principles, that the essential objective is the social, economic and cultural development of countries, that demographic variables and development are interdependent and that policies and demographic targets are an integral part of socio-economic development policies. Guided unfpAs policies and early work In 1984 the Mexico City Conference was held and built on the Bucharest conference. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in 1994 in Cairo which would go on to become highly influential on population policies moving on. During this event, a new Programme of Action was adopted as a guide for national and international action in the field of population and development for twenty years. This new agenda for action has emphasized the indissoluble relationship between population and development and focuses on meeting the needs of individuals within the framework of universally recognized human rights standards rather than simply responding to demographic goals, a turning point for the UN. The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action called for making the rights of women and their reproductive health a central topic in national and international economic and political development efforts. It called for ensuring that all people have access to comprehensive reproductive health care, including voluntary family planning, safe pregnancies and childbirth services, as well as prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. It also recognized that reproductive health and women's empowerment are interdependent, and both are necessary for social progress. The Programme of Action affirmed that: Two special sessions of the United Nations General Assembly were held in

1999 and 2014 to review and assess the implementation of the Program of Action adopted at the 1994 conference.

5.3. Expansion of Mandate

The earlier actions and projects of the unfpa focused much more on population control, getting an overall better understanding of demographics of the world population and family control: The original mandate included:

Building knowledge and capacity in population and family planning.

Promoting awareness globally of population issues and possible strategies.

Assisting countries, at their request, in implementing population programs suited to their needs.

Coordinating the UN system–wide population efforts.

But especially with the shift happening after the 1994 Cairo conference it took a more rights based approach and focused more on improving the life standards of individuals and societies: Protecting their rights, providing equality, placing reproductive health and rights, gender equality, and women’s empowerment at the core of population policy.

In 1995 Following the ICPD, UNFPA’s Executive Board approved a new set of priorities. These included adjustments in how funds were allocated globally, reflecting the new rights-based focus. The following years, UNFPA developed technical and programmatic guidelines aligned with the ICPD vision. For example, in 1997–1998, UNFPA formalized a mission statement to reflect this shift: around that time, it defined its mission as assisting developing countries (at their request) to address reproductive health and population issues, building capacity for population programming, and promoting political will and resource mobilization for population and development work. The following years kept the same approach and policies on population. In as recently as 2016 inside a UNFPA Executive Board document, the Executive Director reaffirmed that UNFPA’s mandate had become more relevant than ever. Key priorities listed included:

- Sexual and reproductive health & rights
- Gender equality
- Empowerment of women and young people
- Demographic dividend (i.e., leveraging youth population for development)
- Humanitarian response & resilience
- Data for development (population data)
- The 2018-2021 strategy was again focusing mostly on the priorities listed above.

The most recent plans (2022-2030) of the committee calls for "urgent action to realize reproductive rights for all" and accelerate implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. UNFPA identifies three “transformative results”: ending unmet need for family planning; ending preventable maternal deaths; ending gender-based violence and harmful practices. UNFPA’s “Expanding Choices” strategy sets out its long-term vision for family planning, further embedding its mandate into global markets), integrating family planning into primary health care, and using its purchasing power to influence global contraceptive Access. A key part of the expanded mandate is gender equality and empowerment. This is not just a

programmatic add-on — it's embedded in UNFPA's core mandate: promoting reproductive rights includes tackling gender-based violence, early marriage, and harmful practices. The alignment with broader UN gender frameworks (e.g., CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, UN Gender Action Plans) shows how UNFPA's mandate is both population-focused and deeply gender-normative

The significances of the mandate expansion we have seen in these years as the UNFPA continued to develop can be listed as:

A change From Quantity to Quality: The mandate expanded from focusing on reducing population growth (quantity) to improving quality of life through health, rights, and empowerment.

Becoming more human rights centered: ICPD (1994) was a watershed — establishing reproductive rights as human rights.

Using population research for sustainable development: The integration of population policies with development (especially via SDGs) means UNFPA sees population not just as a challenge, but as a driver of development (e.g., demographic dividend).

Institutional improvement of the committee : Through its mandate, UNFPA now operates across development, humanitarian settings, and data systems — making it a crucial actor in global health and development.

5.4 Recent Milestones

According to the the strategic plan established for 2022-2025 in 2021 , which is explicitly designed to make and accelerate progress on three “transformative results”: (a) ending unmet need for family planning; (b) ending preventable maternal deaths; (c) ending gender-based violence and harmful practices (e.g., FGM, child marriage), The plan emphasizes “leaving no one behind,” prioritizing populations often marginalized: including ethnic differences sexual orientation and financial situation.

It also calls for transformative ways of working, adapting to global “megatrends” (demographic shifts, inequality, climate, technology) to remain effective. some of the most important recent milestones in UNFPA's mandate and operations, showing how the agency continues to evolve, scale its impact, and align with global priorities include:

Maternal & Newborn Health Thematic Fund (MHTF)

In 2023, the MHTF (a UNFPA-led fund) supported safe delivery care for 2.8 million pregnant women across priority countries, trained 180,000 midwives, and performed 8,697 fistula repair surgeries.

The fund also worked on providing systems for critically ill women to reach help within 2 hours, improving emergency help capacity in many places.

By 2023, about 60% of said countries had fully implemented maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response systems.

In its 2024 Annual Impact Report, the Fund reported even more progress: over 6 million pregnant women accessed safer delivery care; 226,000 midwives were trained; 751 midwifery schools achieved accreditation; and 9,400 women had fistula repair surgery. the Fund doubled to over 19 million US dollars.

The UNFPA Supplies Partnership

In 2023, the UNFPA Supplies Partnership (which helps countries get contraceptives and maternal health medicines) continued its work. The partnership also strengthened health system supply chains and made progress toward sustainable financing, including signing “country compacts” and match-funding mechanisms. With these actions the UNFPA was able to note that these medical supplies reached 54 partner countries and served over 23 million women and girls in low-income settings.

Global Impact & Results of these milestones include

(According to UNFPA’s global results transparency data (for 2022–2023))

~31.2 million unintended pregnancies averted (modelled).

64,730 maternal deaths averted.

145 million “couple-years of protection” through contraceptives procured by UNFPA.

9.5 million unsafe abortions averted.

2.4 million safe deliveries assisted in fragile or humanitarian settings.

273,500 girls “saved” from female genital mutilation (FGM).

200,000 midwives were empowered (trained) via competency-based training in 2023.

18,600 women/girls with obstetric fistula received treatment.

347,000 women and young people with disabilities benefited from SRH (sexual & reproductive health), gender-based violence, and harmful practice services.

As of 2023, global maternal mortality has declined ~ 40% since 2000 (from 328 to 197 deaths per 100,000 live births). However, UNFPA notes that progress is uneven, and in 2023 still ~260,000 maternal deaths occurred. This underlines both success and ongoing challenge.

Midwifery Education Expansion

According to UNFPA’s 2023 annual report: by that year, 578 midwifery schools had been accredited with higher standards.

This accreditation is important because it helps ensure a sustainable, high-quality midwifery workforce, which is critical for safe deliveries, especially in low-resource settings.

And Aligned with its 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, UNFPA increasingly emphasizes reaching populations “left furthest behind

(such as women and girls in poverty, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, indigenous populations.)

The plan explicitly identifies six “outputs” and six “accelerators” to ensure no discrimination: among them are social norms transformation, data & population change, and humanitarian response.

These results propose points of significance such as:

Alignment with SDGs & ICPD: The 2022–2025 Strategic Plan strongly aligns with the ICPD Programme of Action (from Cairo, 1994) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — especially SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 5 (gender equality) which shows the UNFPA’S decisiveness on its policies and likely shows that the actions of the future will follow the same path.

Scale + Quality: UNFPA is not just scaling up services (e.g., more midwives, more deliveries) — it’s also improving quality (accrediting schools, improving referral systems, implementing surveillance for maternal deaths).

Sustainable Financing: Through the UNFPA Supplies Partnership, it is pushing for long-term, sustainable funding (e.g., match funding, country compacts) instead of purely donor-driven models.

Equity Focus: The emphasis on marginalized groups shows that UNFPA is responding to criticism that global population / reproductive programs can neglect or even exclude vulnerable populations.

Accountability: The surveillance systems for maternal and perinatal death (MPDSR) indicate a move toward accountability — not just service delivery, but also measuring and responding to where care fails.

Resilience & Innovation: Even in humanitarian settings or fragile contexts, UNFPA is maintaining focus (e.g., safe deliveries in crises) and leveraging innovation (e.g., better referral networks).

Of course none of these updates come without any challenges, it is important to keep in my mind some potential risks to build a strong foundation:

Depending on funding: Although donor support for MHTF increased by 2024, reliance on external funding always carries risk, especially in volatile geopolitical times.

Uneven Progress: The 40% drop in maternal mortality is good, but 260,000 deaths in 2023 show ongoing gaps, especially in low-resource or conflict-affected countries.

Implementation Complexity: Surveillance systems (MPDSR) require strong national health infrastructure. Full implementation in “only” ~60% of fund-supported countries (as of 2023) shows scale challenges.

Equity Barriers: Reaching “left-behind” populations (e.g., indigenous groups) is often very politically and socially sensitive, and operationalizing these inclusivity priorities is nontrivial.

5.5 Past and Evolution of Population Policies

The policies that countries have on population include these broad categories:

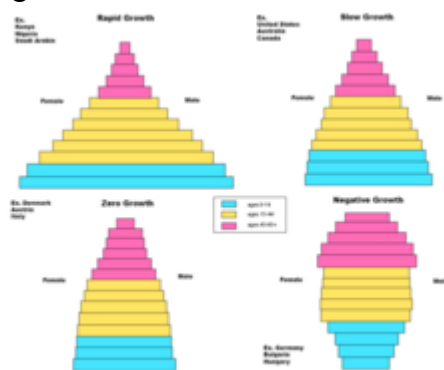
Anti-natalist policies focus on population control, and lowering fertility rates

Pro-natalist is a policy adopted by states trying to raise birth rates.

Neutral / market-oriented :This policy suggests that the said country does not have a direct family policy but rely mainly on socioeconomic change)

Migration-oriented (use immigration to address labour shortages)

National population policies have ranged from coercive, target-driven family-planning programmes to rights-based reproductive health strategies and, more recently, to pronatalist measures designed to counteract very low fertility and population ageing. Country case studies demonstrate how demographic context (high fertility, youth bulges, or ageing populations), politics, and socioeconomic conditions shape policy choices and outcomes. The following case studies use UN and UNFPA sources t



o illustrate policy types, major measures, and measurable demographic consequences.

China — from one-child limits to pronatalist incentives

“China’s mid-late 20th century population policy prioritized strong fertility reduction through strict family-size regulation and incentives for compliance. Beginning in 2015 and accelerated with policy changes in 2021, China moved to relax restrictions (two- and then three-child policies) and introduce local incentives to encourage births. Despite these changes, fertility has continued to fall and the population is aging; UN assessments note that low fertility and population ageing are now major development challenges requiring policy attention to labour, pensions and reproductive rights.”

Japan is a country known for its low fertility rates, strong ageing and has had a lot of policy experimentation in its history ranging from childcare expansions worker protections and incentives but the birth rates and population still remained low making Japan an example of the pronatalist incentives without social and economic change.

India’s family planning history includes periods of target-driven family control campaigns, but since endorsing the ICPD Programme of Action it has moved towards rights-based family planning, maternal health and expanding method choice—efforts documented in UNFPA India country materials and national health strategies. India also showed Contemporary focus on: expanding contraceptive choice, adolescent health, reducing unmet need being an example of a shift in policies of quality over quantity in recent years.

Iran demonstrates how quickly policy direction can change: after a successful family-planning programme in the 1990s that sharply reduced fertility, policymakers in the 2010s adopted pronatalist measures to raise births—an example of policy reversal driven by political and demographic concerns.

Seen in these case studies countries can shape their population policies with time accordingly to demographic needs a few reasons to why this change might be are:

Demographic drivers: aging, fertility decline, youth bulges. (Use World Population Prospects & World Population Ageing reports). Birleşmiş Milletler+1

Economic drivers: labour supply, pension burdens, development goals.

Political & ideological shifts: e.g., pronatalist reversals in Iran or policy relaxations in China. PMC+1

Pandemics and humanitarian crises: impact access and priorities (maternal health setbacks).

6.1 Reproductive Health, Rights, and Demographic Governance

Reproductive health and rights are the foundation of modern population policy. The ICPD Programme of Action established that individuals must have the freedom and means to decide the timing, spacing, and number of their children, and must be supported with comprehensive information and services to do so. UNFPA leads global efforts to ensure these rights are realized.

Despite major progress, inequalities remain deeply entrenched. Around 218 million women in low- and middle-income countries lack access to modern contraception. Maternal mortality remains extremely uneven: Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for roughly 70% of all global maternal deaths, and women in rural areas are significantly less likely to be attended by skilled health workers during childbirth.

These disparities are shaped by socioeconomic inequality, geography, marginalization, and conflict. Poverty exacerbates maternal mortality, limits access to fertility services, and increases adolescent pregnancy rates. Girls' education is strongly correlated with improved reproductive outcomes; yet millions of girls are still unable to complete secondary education.

Rural regions face chronic shortages of healthcare workers, emergency obstetric care, and consistent contraceptive supply. Migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, and displaced persons face additional legal and cultural barriers. Humanitarian crises further deepen gender inequalities, with 60% of preventable maternal deaths occurring in conflict zones and gender-based violence rising sharply during emergencies.

For population policies to be ethical and effective, they must address these inequalities directly. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, strong health workforces—especially midwives—social protection, and equitable financing structures are essential. UNFPA emphasizes that population interventions must never target specific ethnic, low-income, or marginalized groups for demographic reasons, as such actions violate both human rights and international law.

6.2 Family Planning

Family planning is a cornerstone of reproductive health, empowering individuals to determine their reproductive futures. It is not, as once understood, a demographic control mechanism; rather, it is a human rights intervention with wide-ranging health and economic benefits.

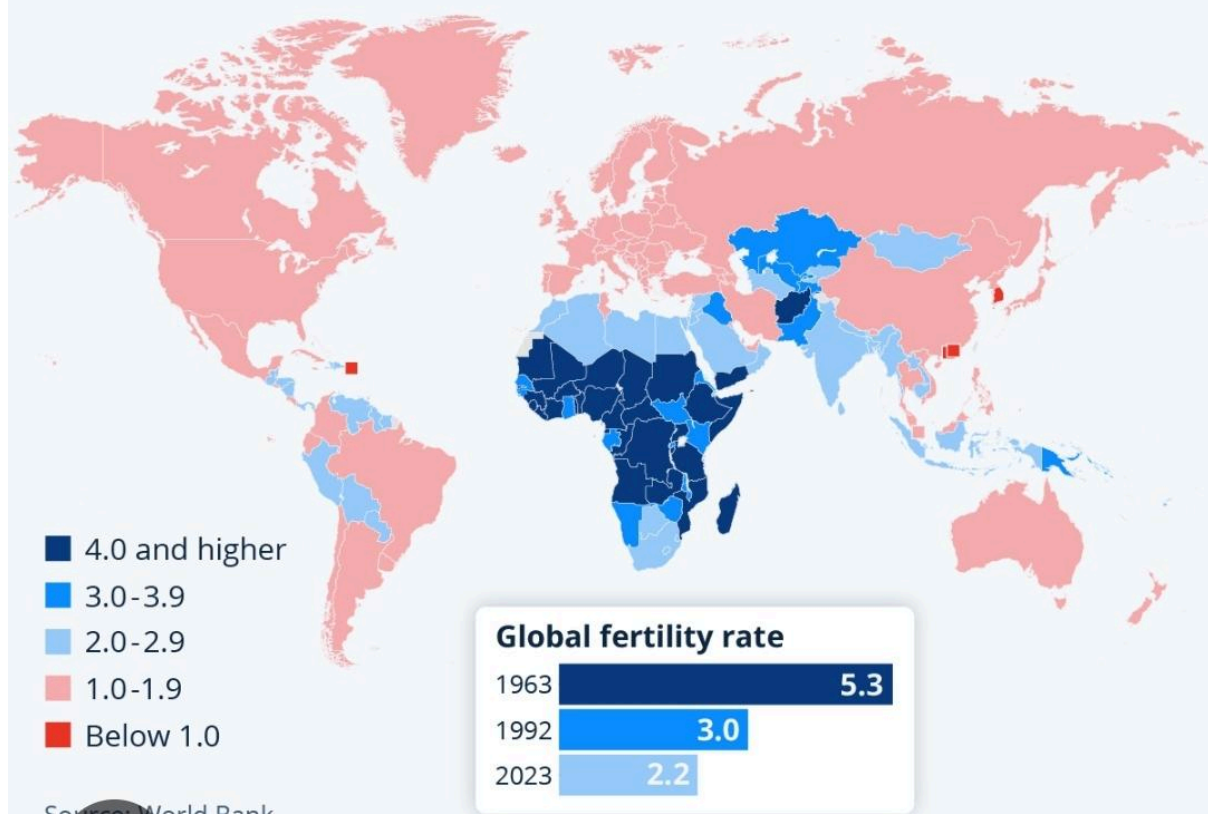
Voluntary family planning reduces maternal mortality by preventing unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and complications. It also supports women's education, employment, and autonomy, contributing to broader social and economic development. Every dollar invested in family planning yields approximately eight dollars in economic returns.

However, major disparities persist globally. While the global contraceptive prevalence rate is about 58%, it drops to 37% in the least developed countries. Around 121 million unintended pregnancies occur annually, and unsafe abortion remains a significant contributor to global maternal mortality.

A rights-based family planning program requires several core components. Countries must provide a wide “method mix”: short-acting methods, long-acting reversible contraceptives, and permanent options, ensuring individuals can choose the method most suitable for them. Counseling must be non-coercive and confidential, especially in countries with histories of forced sterilization or demographic targets. Youth-friendly services are essential, as adolescents often face stigma, legal barriers, and misinformation. Strengthening supply chains is also vital to avoid stock-outs and ensure consistent access—a role where UNFPA serves as the world's most important provider in humanitarian contexts.

The State of Global Fertility

Fertility rate by country in 2023 (births per woman)



6.3 Gender Inequality and Its Demographic Impact

Gender inequality is both a driver and consequence of demographic trends. Where women lack autonomy and rights, fertility rates are typically higher, adolescent pregnancies more common, and maternal mortality much greater. Women's access to education, employment, healthcare, and safety directly shapes reproductive outcomes.

Globally, only 56% of women can make decisions about their own reproductive health—a striking indicator of how widespread gender inequality remains. Child marriage continues to affect an estimated 12 million girls each year, contributing significantly to early pregnancy and maternal mortality. Women perform the vast majority of unpaid care work worldwide, limiting their opportunities for education and paid employment.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is among the most severe manifestations of gender inequality, with one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. GBV not only violates human rights but directly interferes with reproductive autonomy; intimate partner violence dramatically increases unintended pregnancy, yet most survivors never receive support.

Economic empowerment plays a complex role in fertility. In low- and middle-income countries, women's access to paid work typically correlates with declining fertility because

autonomy and opportunity expand. In contrast, in high-income contexts, greater gender equality tends to increase fertility, as shared caregiving responsibilities allow women to combine work and family life. This is reflected in the Nordic model, where high gender equality correlates with higher fertility compared to countries with more traditional gender norms.

UNFPA emphasizes that strengthening gender equality—from education and economic inclusion to legal protection and safety—is essential for establishing demographic resilience, improving reproductive health outcomes, and achieving sustainable development.

7. Population Data, Research and Policy

Population data is the foundation of every effective demographic policy. Governments cannot design reproductive health systems, education strategies, urban planning models, or social protection measures without understanding who their population is, where they live, and what their needs are. For UNFPA, high-quality data is not only a technical tool but a human rights issue: reliable statistics ensure that no community is invisible, and that resources are allocated fairly. This section explains the challenges of over- and underpopulation, the importance of censuses, the ethical questions surrounding demographic data, and the main policy options countries can use to respond to demographic realities.

7.1 Issues Arising from Overpopulation and Underpopulation

Modern demographic challenges tend to fall into two broad categories: overpopulation pressures and underpopulation decline. Each creates its own social and economic consequences, and both require nuanced, rights-based responses.

In countries facing overpopulation, the core challenge is that population growth outpaces the capacity of governments to provide services. High fertility rates, especially where reproductive health access is limited, can strain school systems, healthcare facilities, housing, food supply, and employment opportunities. Overcrowded cities suffer from informal settlements and weak infrastructure, while rural areas can experience environmental degradation and loss of agricultural sustainability. Importantly, overpopulation is often rooted in gender inequality: when girls leave school early or lack access to contraception, fertility rates remain high. UNFPA emphasizes that the solution is never coercion but empowerment—ensuring reproductive rights, expanding education, and supporting women’s autonomy.

Underpopulation, on the other hand, is increasingly common in high-income or rapidly developing states. Here, fertility rates drop below replacement level, leading to ageing populations, shrinking workforces, and increased pressure on social welfare systems. Countries like Japan, South Korea, and parts of Europe face economic contraction, labour shortages, and rising healthcare costs for elderly populations. Underpopulation also weakens national resilience, affecting everything from pensions to national security. The drivers of low fertility are complex: high living costs, gendered labour burdens, unstable job markets, and limited childcare support often make family formation difficult. Effective responses must

therefore focus on structural reforms, gender equality, and creating environments where individuals feel supported in choosing to have children.

While overpopulation and underpopulation seem opposite, both ultimately stem from inequalities—whether in access to family planning or in the social conditions needed to balance work and family life. UNFPA's approach encourages countries to use demographic evidence to craft rights-based, long-term policies rather than reactive or coercive measures.

7.2 Conducting National Censuses

A national census is one of the most important tools for demographic analysis. Conducted roughly every ten years, censuses provide a complete count of a country's population and collect basic information on age, sex, location, education, employment, migration and household characteristics. Governments rely on census data to plan hospitals, schools, transportation networks, vaccination campaigns, and emergency responses. Without accurate census results, entire regions or groups risk being underrepresented in public policy.

However, conducting a census is a complex, resource-intensive process. Countries must prepare robust mapping systems, train enumerators, ensure data protection, and build public trust. Many states—especially those affected by conflict, disasters, or political instability—struggle to complete nationwide counts. In these contexts, UNFPA often provides direct operational support, ranging from technical assistance and digital tools to funding and field implementation.

The 2020 Census Round (spanning 2015–2024) introduced significant innovations. Many countries adopted digital enumeration, satellite-based mapping, and online questionnaires for the first time. These changes improved accuracy but also exposed gaps in digital literacy and cybersecurity. Lessons from this round highlighted several needs: investment in secure digital infrastructure, strategies for counting displaced and mobile populations, better communication campaigns to reduce mistrust, and flexible methodologies for crisis zones. Delegates should be aware that census work is not merely statistical—it carries political, ethical, and humanitarian implications.

7.3 Cultural Sensitivity and Ethical Considerations

Collecting demographic data requires a high degree of cultural awareness and ethical responsibility. Populations must feel that providing information is safe, voluntary, and used to improve—not police—their lives. Trust is especially critical when working with marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, refugees or regions where historical misuse of data has created fear.

Ethical demographic work follows several key principles. First, participation must be grounded in informed consent, where respondents understand why data is being collected and how it will be used. Second, demographic surveys must avoid reinforcing stereotypes or discrimination. For example, questions about marital status, fertility, or ethnicity must be asked respectfully and with sensitivity to cultural norms. Third, data protection is essential. Poorly secured digital databases can expose personal information, creating risks for vulnerable populations.

Cultural sensitivity also affects how questions are phrased, which languages are offered, and who is hired as field enumerators. In many regions, women are more comfortable discussing reproductive health issues with female enumerators; youth may require youth-friendly survey designs; and indigenous communities may need consultation with local leaders before data collection begins. UNFPA encourages countries to integrate local stakeholders into every stage of demographic research to ensure dignity, respect, and community ownership.

7.4 Policies Countries Can Implement

Population data provides the evidence base for demographic policies. Countries typically combine several types of strategies depending on their needs, but all must remain grounded in human rights and free choice.

Migration policies help balance demographic pressures by encouraging labour mobility, filling workforce shortages, or managing rural–urban flows. These policies must ensure migrants have access to healthcare, education, and legal protection to prevent exploitation.

Education and empowerment policies are especially important for countries with high fertility rates. Keeping girls in school, expanding economic opportunities for women, and promoting comprehensive sexuality education are among the most effective ways to slow rapid population growth without coercion. Empowered individuals exercise greater reproductive autonomy and contribute to long-term social stability.

Health-oriented population policies focus on improving access to reproductive health services, maternal care, contraception, and universal health coverage. They aim to reduce maternal mortality, prevent unintended pregnancies, and support informed reproductive choices. These policies benefit countries facing both overpopulation and underpopulation.

Anti-natalist policies—historically used in high-fertility contexts—attempt to reduce fertility through incentives for smaller families or expanded access to contraception. Modern approaches emphasize rights-based strategies, avoiding the coercive policies of the past.

Pro-natalist policies attempt to raise fertility rates through measures such as parental leave, childcare support, financial allowances, housing subsidies, and work–life balance reforms. Successful examples highlight that fertility increases only when women and families feel economically stable and socially supported—not when pressured.

Effective demographic policy is rarely a single intervention. Instead, it is an integrated, evidence-based approach that adapts to cultural context and population needs. The role of

UNFPA and the international community is to help countries understand their demographic realities and design strategies that promote well-being, rights, and long-term sustainability.

All policies must remain aligned with UNFPA's human rights principles: voluntariness, non-discrimination, and respect for individual autonomy

8. International Cooperation and UNFPA's Role

8.1 Strengthening Global Partnerships

UNFPA supports an interconnected network of partnerships that bring together governments, UN agencies, NGOs, research institutions, civil society, youth-led organizations, and private sector actors. These partnerships are built on the understanding that demographic issues are multi-dimensional: improving reproductive health requires strong healthcare systems; empowering women requires legal reforms; supporting youth requires education and employment opportunities; addressing migration requires regional coordination. No single institution can deliver all of this. Global cooperation ensures that efforts complement each other instead of overlapping or contradicting.

One of UNFPA's key strengths is its ability to act as a bridge. On one hand, it provides governments with demographic expertise, technical assistance, funding mechanisms, and field capacity. On the other, it brings in global knowledge, evidence, and best practices gathered from decades of work in diverse contexts. When crises strike — whether conflict, displacement, natural disasters, or disease outbreaks — UNFPA works with humanitarian partners to deliver life-saving reproductive health services, protect women and girls, and support safe childbirth even under the most challenging conditions. These emergency partnerships require coordination with UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF, WFP, OCHA, and countless NGOs.

Beyond humanitarian work, UNFPA supports long-term development cooperation. It partners with ministries of health on maternal care systems; with national statistics offices for censuses and demographic surveys; with ministries of education on comprehensive sexuality education; and with youth networks to elevate young voices in policy-making. A core UNFPA focus is creating partnerships that respect cultural and national contexts: cooperation must help countries advance rights and well-being without overriding local values or imposing external agendas. For this reason, UNFPA emphasizes dialogue, community engagement, and working with local leaders to build trust.

Global partnerships also extend to South–South Cooperation. Countries that have made successful demographic transitions — such as Thailand, Tunisia, Ethiopia, or Bangladesh — share experiences, policies, and technical models with regions currently undergoing similar challenges. This peer-to-peer form of cooperation is often more effective than traditional top-down approaches because it is grounded in shared realities and mutual understanding. UNFPA helps facilitate these exchanges, organize training programmes, and support regional networks.

For delegates, understanding global partnerships means recognizing that demographic solutions must be collaborative, culturally respectful, and based on shared responsibility. Proposals for resolutions should aim to strengthen cooperation rather than create dependency, and they should focus on building sustainable national capacity

Question to Ponder

- 1-What strategies ensure effective coordination in humanitarian crises or conflict zones?
- 2-How can UNFPA support countries in collecting and using population data to make effective policies?
- 3-What strategies should delegates propose to ensure cooperation doesn't impose policies against local values?
- 4-How can the international community assess the impact of UNFPA programs?
- 5- How can UNFPA improve collaboration with governments, NGOs, and UN agencies to reach vulnerable populations?
- 6-What role do international partnerships play in supporting young people in conflict or low-income countries?

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