“All environmental problems become harder - and ultimately impossible - to solve with ever more people.”

Sir David Attenborough, patron
Population and consumption

We are consuming 50 per cent more than our planet can support, yet global consumption per head continues to rise as globalization and industrialization spreads. At the same time, global population, which has doubled in the last fifty years, is growing by 80 million a year. It is forecast to rise from 7 billion today to 11 billion by 2100, within the lifetime of many.

This growth in consumption and population threatens efforts to protect biodiversity, conserve resources, limit climate change, alleviate poverty and maintain our quality of life.

If we are to sustain the planet and ourselves, we must reduce waste, adopt sustainable lifestyles and technologies, and help people to have smaller families. By acting now, we can change future outcomes for the better.

Developing countries

The population of Africa alone is expected to grow four fold this century, due to people living longer, a record number of young people and high fertility rates. Increasing conflict and migration are driven at least partly by unsustainable population growth.

By helping people to have smaller families, we can limit the population size before industrialization leads to higher per capita consumption. Moreover, smaller families enable households and communities to prosper immediately by releasing funds for investment in health, education and infrastructure.

"It's our population growth that underlies just about every single one of the problems that we've inflicted on the planet."

Jane Goodall, primatologist and patron

"Population stabilisation should become a priority for sustainable development."

Kofi Annan, ex Secretary – General of the UN
We should:

- support the universal provision of affordable, acceptable and available family planning services, including information, a range of methods and supply continuity, to the many millions of women that have no or limited access or suffer from misinformation or societal pressures
- help conservative societies accept that girls and women should be able to both decide when and how many children to have and access education and employment opportunities
- promote the benefits of smaller families to individuals, households and society

Developed countries

Developed countries consume more resources than they produce. This is neither fair nor, ultimately, sustainable. While fertility rates are lower than in developing countries, population numbers are rising due to unbalanced migration and people living longer.

The UK has relatively high rates of population density and population growth; it is forecast that there will be an estimated ten million more people in just the next 25 years. The consequences include insufficient housing, transport congestion and pollution, poorer access to services, loss of natural habitat and a rising cost of living.

“We need to recognise that slowing population growth is one of the most cost-effective and reliable ways of easing pressure on our environment and securing a sustainable future for us all.”

Lionel Shriver, author and patron

“There’s no point future of pandas, polar bears and tigers when we’re not addressing the one single factor that’s putting more pressure on the ecosystem than any other - namely the ever-increasing size of the world’s population.”

Chris Packham, naturalist and patron
For a sustainable future with reasonable living standards, populations have to ultimately fall, not rise. We should:

- improve sex and relationships education and family planning services so that there are fewer unplanned pregnancies.
- promote the benefits of smaller families
- limit unbalanced migration

**Older people**

As we live longer and fertility rates fall, the proportion of older people rises. They need support, but the answer is not larger families or unbalanced migration. That simply results in bigger problems in the future, as these additional people grow old in turn and as the population rises.

Instead, we should:

- reduce workforce requirements by reducing waste and increasing automation

- maintain the workforce size by supporting healthy older people in appropriate roles, providing training for the unemployed and underemployed and ensuring affordable childcare for those with small children

**Population Matters**

Population Matters is a long established and growing UK based membership charity. We have thousands of members across dozens of countries. We work with others worldwide to campaign, conduct research and educate for smaller, more sustainable families. We call for better sex and reproductive health and rights, women’s empowerment and the promotion of smaller families as part of a sustainable lifestyle.

Help us to raise these issues by joining us via our website. Members receive regular news and analyses, help with raising the issue, and invitations to get involved by joining a local group, campaigning or volunteering.