

# POPULATION MATTERS

Issue 40 Spring 2022

## Voices for choices

Meet Nyombi Morris, Ugandan climate change activist and PM Choice Ambassador

## Welcome to Gilead

How the push for more babies is harming women

## Do ageing populations spell economic disaster?

Our comprehensive report finds no need to press the panic button



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every choice counts



## About us

Population Matters is a UK-based charity working globally to achieve our vision of humanity co-existing in harmony with nature and prospering on a healthy planet. We drive positive action through fostering choices that will help achieve a sustainable human population and regenerate our environment. We promote positive, practical, ethical solutions – encouraging people to choose smaller families and inspiring people to consume sustainably – to enable everyone to enjoy a decent quality of life whilst sustaining the natural ecosystems upon which all life depends. We are committed to human rights, women's empowerment and global justice.

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## Magazine

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# From the Director

Opening up the debate about population continues to be a challenge, yet when opportunities are created for more diverse voices to join the conversation, meaningful discussions can be heard, loud and clear.



*"Population Matters welcomes diverse voices and is inclusive to everyone."* That's not my claim or a carefully crafted strapline from a PR company, but the words of one of our Choice Ambassadors, Ugandan climate change activist Nyombi Morris (page 7). Diversity, dialogue, creating the space and opportunity for people from across the world to be part of the 'population conversation' and to find a consensus is a strong theme of PM's activity over the past months.

## GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

Our Conference, 'Boom or Bust?', (page 6) brought together a diverse group of speakers, 'zooming' in from four continents and five time zones to 'confer' on the interplay between population dynamics, economics, and the more nuanced concept of 'wellbeing'.

The consensus which emerged was that pronouncements by pro-growth pundits, such as the statement by billionaire Elon Musk that declining birth rates are the "greatest risk to the future of civilisation", are absurd. With Dr Leticia Appiah from Ghana stating unequivocally, "What we really need is to slow population growth and have zero

population growth [everywhere] – a view affirmed by Dr Sarah Harper, joining online from the rather closer Oxford, who said: "Falling fertility is good: it's good for communities and good for women."

## CHOICES AND RIGHTS

And it's in communities globally, through our Empower to Plan initiative, that PM is enabling greater numbers of women and girls (and men and boys) to have conversations about their reproductive choices and rights.

Our Empower to Plan Coordinator, Catriona Spaven-Donn, continues to strengthen our links with grassroots groups across Central and Latin America. Na'leb'ak (page 16), which works with indigenous communities in Guatemala, being a key one – its name translating from the Maya Q'eqchi' language as 'a collective dialogue to reach a consensus'.

**The shared views and emerging consensus from our Conference speakers and amongst the communities we engage with across the world is striking.**

The shared views and emerging consensus from our Conference speakers and amongst the communities we engage with across the world is striking, as illustrated at the 'Population Conversation' symposium, held in Kenya in early March (see [my blog on PM's website](#) for a detailed summary).

Supported and co-hosted by PM, the event was very much the 'brainchild' of, organised by, and for, Kenyans. Of over 30 participants, I was the only non-African in attendance. The title came about through the ongoing dialogue between PM and the main driver

of the event, Dr Monique Oliff, a Kenya-based public and women's health consultant. At the time, I didn't know what Na'leb'ak meant, nor had I made the link back to our Conference and what such a gathering should be at best – an open dialogue, sharing of views, with an ambition to find some consensus.

## WHO MENTIONED THE 'P' WORD?

The need for enabling more open, honest conversation around the population issue was brought home to me at COP26, notable for the organisers' efforts to avoid any mention of the 'p' word – as wryly observed by Dr Elijah Zulu of African development think-tank AFIDEP (and keynote speaker at our Conference). He noted: "If you go around this COP or previous conferences, the 'p' word, as I call it, seems to be forbidden."

Dr Zulu's comment underlines the reality that despite a diversity of voices supporting and adding to ours, other counter voices, particularly in rich Global North countries, are steering the conversation to a different consensus. Some, like Musk's, are easy to refute as blatantly self-serving and unsupported by any evidence. Others are more dangerous, actively repressing human and women's rights, as outlined in PM's pioneering report, *Welcome to Gilead* (page 10), which exposes the malign, chauvinistic dogma of pronatalism.

What's clear is that offering opportunities for more voices like Nyombi's to be heard – and generating more 'population conversations' globally – is an absolute priority.

**Robin Maynard**

Executive Director, Population Matters





# Population Matters news round-up

## Food systems 'at breaking point'

A new report by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) warns that our modern agricultural systems are stretched to breaking point, spelling worsening environmental impacts and an increasing threat to food and water security. This is particularly alarming as continued population growth will lead to even higher food demand.

The 2021 *State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture* (SOLAW) report states: "Human use of land and water for agriculture has not yet peaked, but all evidence points to slowing growth in agricultural productivity, rapid exhaustion of productive capacity and generation of environmental harm." Worryingly, the authors note that the situation has "much deteriorated" since the last SOLAW report was published in 2011.

With our population expected to increase by two billion people by mid-century, the FAO estimates that the total amount of food produced will need to double relative to 2012 to meet demand and achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ending hunger.

While the report urges better land management, supporting farmers to implement more sustainable practices and utilising technological innovation, the authors fail to acknowledge the urgent need to reduce humanity's demand for meat and dairy and to tackle food waste.

Also missing from the report is the promotion of positive, empowering and available solutions, including

girls' education and family planning, which could put the SDGs within reach and reduce the tremendous pressure on food systems and the environment by slowing population growth.



Photo by James Baltz on Unsplash

## We smashed our target!

We're thrilled to announce that our 30th anniversary appeal exceeded our target, raising a total of £105,714.

This incredible amount will help accelerate our campaigns. More than 830 generous members and supporters contributed gifts both large and small, which will help Population Matters deliver its goals and underpin our campaigns in the coming year and beyond. Thank you again to all those of you who contributed and for playing your part in making a better future possible.



experience during the past year. The top topics of interest continue to be global population growth, and nature and biodiversity, but climate change has also been on people's minds. There's also a growing interest in learning more about sustainable living and consumption, so we hope to be able to feature more on that later this year.

There remains lots of interest in attending themed talks and Q&A sessions, which we kicked off this year with a strategy preview for our catalyst members, and an overview and Q&A on our *Welcome to Gilead* report (see page 10 for more information) earlier this year.

Thank you for taking the time to feedback on our work, and here's to another great year of campaigning in 2022. Take a look at the panel opposite which reveals some of the things we've been able to achieve over the past year, thanks to your continued support.

### OUR SURVEY SAID?

An additional thank you to everyone who took part in our latest annual survey. More than 500 members from 27 countries shared their opinions. We're delighted to find that 87% continue to be 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with their

## PM by numbers

**3,898** online campaign actions by supporters

**6,000+** views of our webinars

**823,690** website visitors from 229 countries

**36%** increase in Instagram followers

**32%** increase in YouTube subscribers

**43** new catalyst members, each giving at least £600 annually to support our campaigns

**779** new Population Matters members

**£13,995** raised for Empower to Plan projects

Source: Population Matters, Annual Report, July 2020-June 2021

## Gender equality: Have we made progress?

Photo by Sandy Miller on Unsplash



A new UN report measures the progress made towards gender equality across all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Due to lack of investment and major setbacks precipitated by the pandemic, the overall picture is bleak.

Two of the most fundamental human wellbeing indicators, access to money and access to food, have been hit hard, with existing inequalities further exacerbated. The report states: “Progress in eliminating extreme poverty has reversed, while holes in the social protection floor leave women even more vulnerable.”

During the first year of the pandemic, an additional 12 million women experienced disruptions in family planning services, leading to an estimated 1.4 million additional unintended pregnancies and 113,400 additional maternal deaths. The report also reveals that the proportion of women and girls subjected to physical or sexual violence has remained unchanged for more than a decade, affecting a staggering 736 million in 2020.

[Turn to page 18 for more on the impact of the global pandemic and aid cuts on women >>](#)

## Threat to US abortion rights

Photo by Gayatri Mahotra on Unsplash



Population Matters was watching closely as, last December, the US Supreme Court heard the oral argument in *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the country's most important abortion case in decades.

The right to abortion is not legally enshrined in the US, and individual states can set their own restrictions, but until now they've been prohibited by a crucial 1973 Supreme Court ruling, *Roe v Wade*, from making abortion illegal before the foetus is viable. This *Dobbs v Jackson* case is a direct threat to *Roe*.

Solicitor General Prelogar cautioned that if the Court does overturn *Roe*, the “real world effects would be severe and swift”. It's likely that nearly half of the states would quickly make abortion illegal – many without exception for rape or incest. And even if *Roe* isn't completely overruled, states would still be emboldened to enact additional restrictions on abortion. We'll continue to monitor this worrying situation.

[Turn to page 10 for details of our must-read new report on coercive population policies >>](#)



Photo by Lachlan Gowen on Unsplash

## Emerging threats of the Anthropocene

A new UN report shines a light on emerging environmental threats, including noise pollution, wildfires and shifts in the timing of key seasonal events.

Our current geological epoch is called the Anthropocene because of how significantly our species is altering the natural world. In its 2022 report, *Noise, Blazes and Mismatches*, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) draws attention to some emerging issues of environmental concern and their implications.

### Noise is more than a nuisance

At high population densities, people are rarely free from noise pollution. Prolonged exposure to high levels of noise can damage hearing, negatively affect mental health and cause cardiovascular and metabolic problems through stress and disturbed sleep. The report states that long-term noise exposure contributes to 48,000 new cases of coronary heart disease and causes 12,000 premature deaths every year. Humans aren't the only species to suffer. Many wild animals living in urban environments, such as songbirds, rely heavily on acoustic communication. When this is disrupted by noise, it can lead to behaviour changes which negatively affect survival.

### A world on fire

Naturally occurring wildfires play an important role in ecosystem function, but human activity is causing more frequent and severe fires around the world, from the western United States to Australia to the Amazon rainforest and Europe. With the climate continuing to warm, scientists expect a worsening situation.

### Ecosystems in peril

Climate warming is also shifting the timing of life cycle events, such as the emergence of pollinators or bird nesting, which has a huge effect on ecosystem health. For example, bee activity in spring needs to coincide with flowering, otherwise bees may starve and plants can't reproduce.

The report unfortunately fails to offer advice on confronting the root drivers of these emerging environmental threats. While adaptation and better management are important, the only true long-term solution is to tackle hyper-consumption and end human population growth as soon as is ethically possible, which is what we at Population Matters will continue to campaign for.



# Fresh perspectives, positive challenges



The recent Population Matters conference **Boom or Bust?** examined how demographic changes can help develop an economy which delivers wellbeing and lasting security on a healthy planet. **Alistair Currie** reports.

**HELD SIMULTANEOUSLY LIVE** in central London and online, our landmark conference in October addressed the critical intersection of population and economics. With a theme of how societies can flourish with smaller, more sustainable populations, a truly global cast of speakers – from Africa, Asia, Europe and the US – brought real authority to the proceedings.

## INCONVENIENT TRUTHS

**Graeme Maxton**, an expert in environmental and sustainable economics, opened the event with a stark presentation of the potentially devastating consequences if we don't get climate change under control.

His call for action was echoed by **Laurel Hanscom** of the Global Footprint Network and **Gaya Herrington**, a researcher in growth and planetary limits, who discussed the pressure on our environment generated by our ever-expanding consumption. Laurel lamented the “*economists who do not accept the Earth is finite*” and promote never-ending growth. She reminded us that ending ‘overshoot’ requires both decreasing consumption and addressing population growth.

Gaya presented the compelling findings of her recent paper updating the seminal 1972 paper, *Limits to Growth*, showing that without further action, its worst-case scenarios are likely to be

met. As she clearly stated it, we need to “end the crude pursuit of growth”.

**It is politically very irresponsible to put pressure on couples in high-consuming countries to have more children.**

**Prof Sarah Harper**

Looking at solutions, **Chaitanya Kumar** of the New Economics Foundation presented examples of his recent work with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (of which PM is a member) examining specific policy changes that will help create an economy suited to the challenges we all face. Meanwhile, environmental economist **Dr Jeroen van den Bergh** proposed measuring economic success through sustainability and social welfare criteria, rather than GDP.

## BUILDING BETTER LIVES IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES

Our two expert speakers based in Africa provided critical insights and perspectives on the situation there.

**Dr Leticia Appiah** of the National Population Council of Ghana explained that high fertility rates hamper development while improving access to family planning benefits not

just individual women but whole societies: “*What we really need is to slow population growth and have zero population growth [everywhere].*”

Keynote speaker, **Dr Eliya Zulu** of the African Institute for Development Policy, explained how population growth intersects with a range of problems and showed that the imperative for high-fertility countries is to meet their citizens’ primary needs for family planning, education, and healthcare – which also slows population growth.

## SILVER LININGS, NOT BURDENS

In high income countries, low birth rates prompt panic about the alleged economic consequences which inspired the conference’s title. Our speakers, however, echoed the findings of PM’s *Silver Linings* report, launched at the event (see page 14) – that an ageing population is not something to fear.

**Prof Sarah Harper** of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing dispelled many myths about future population trends and warned of the risks of pronatal policies. Her prescription of better pension and healthcare policies to address ageing were very much in line with those in our report.

Former head of the CBI, **Lord Adair Turner** of the Institute for New Economic Thinking, persuasively amplified those points, advising policymakers that sound macroeconomic policy could address prevailing concerns. He also noted that relieving global poverty will drive up per capita resource and energy use, stating: “*it is facile to say that population growth has really nothing to do with climate change.*”

The Boom or Bust event powerfully showed a path for sustainable economics and better lives through ending population growth. In bringing together experts to address these issues, our conference was just the start of our work to advance that case.



Conference chair Emma Duncan of *The Economist* hosts the panel debate.

■ To view the conference playlist on YouTube, search: **Boom or Bust Population Matters Conference 2021**.

# "Our voices can hold all decision-makers accountable if we use them well."

Voted Environmentalist of Tomorrow by CNN in 2021, **Nyombi Morris** is a climate change activist from Uganda. With a mission to educate and inspire young people, he's just become one of our **Choice Ambassadors**.



Photo courtesy of Nyombi Morris

**SINCE MY CHILDHOOD**, I have felt the effects of climate change. We had to evacuate our home region in 2009 because of flooding. Growing up, I saw illegal sand mining being carried out in our neighbourhood near Lake Victoria. The sand was profitable for construction, so people would come to mine often. At first, I didn't make the connection between our land being flooded and the sand mining. Then I saw activist Vanessa Nakate on TV, in front of the parliament, demanding for a climate emergency to be declared. I started researching climate information online. A few months later, I took my first action, standing on the street with a cardboard sign stating: 'School Strike for Climate, #FridaysForFuture'. For me, there was no looking back.

Today I'm a climate justice advocate for the Rise Up movement. Set up in 2019, we provide support for young people from all over the world to join forces and oppose climate change. I've also set up a project – Taking Climate Change to Schools – which includes topics such as climate syllabus, collaboration, planting trees, and recycling plastic waste. Education is critical because many Africans remain ignorant about climate change, and we need future leaders to understand people's needs and develop nature-based solutions. So far, I've planted more than 47,500 trees and visited 30 schools.

## SECRETS AND SHAME

In November 2020, I became aware of friends in the US being mistreated on the issue of supporting abortion. At the same time, we discovered my younger

sister was pregnant – the father had vanished, and she'd kept it a secret. A teacher suspected after seeing her behaviour change and took her for a scan. By this stage, she was seven months. I asked her why she kept it to herself. She replied that she was afraid of abortion because it is not allowed in Uganda, and some doctors who do them get arrested. Thinking about all these things, I decided that I will also use my voice to advocate for women and girls as well as climate change.

Government and other institutions should legalise safe abortion to allow women and girls to decide for themselves the right time to have a baby. Women need to be educated so they don't think about motherhood at an early age. We must empower them with the belief that they can do anything without the support of men, that they can be leaders.

## THE CHANCE TO HAVE A CHOICE

Education and empowerment to enable women and girls to make choices about their bodies and how many children they have, and when, is at the heart of the real solution to all the complex issues that feed into climate change. Many countries in Africa are stuck in debt as they

keep borrowing to create employment opportunities for all the young people. We have to show all the reasons why countries with stable populations don't suffer as many consequences compared to those with ever-growing populations. Like many African families, our parents never planned for us.

With high populations everything is small, people are forced to build in swamps, people are forced to do illegal mining, people look at everything as a source of income and both humans and nature are exploited. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change, natural disasters, pandemics and wars. Those young girls who are unable to return or go to school, most of them end up with unplanned pregnancies.

After realising the similarities between what I was trying to offer the world and what Population Matters stands for, I became a Choice Ambassador. Population Matters welcomes diverse voices and is inclusive to everyone. Join us and let us all make a difference.

■ To find out more about **Taking Climate Change to Schools**, visit [gofund.me/e58d4838](https://gofund.me/e58d4838).

## HELP US BUILD A NETWORK OF PM CHOICE AMBASSADORS

The world needs more champions like Nyombi. If you're a young person interested in promoting ethical and practical population solutions, uplifting women and girls, and tackling the environmental crisis, why not become a Choice Ambassador too? Email **Florence Blondel** at [enquiries@populationmatters.org](mailto:enquiries@populationmatters.org), using the subject line 'Choice Ambassador'. Find out more at [populationmatters.org/our-choice-ambassadors](https://populationmatters.org/our-choice-ambassadors).





# PM talks population on the

**Andrew Howard** reports on how PM promoted the population issue at two major events – the **IUCN World Conservation Congress** in Marseille and **COP26** in Glasgow.

**THE FACT THAT POPULATION** was not on the official agendas of the IUCN Congress and COP26 underpins why our work to raise awareness and catalyse positive change is needed more than ever.

## STANDING OUT IN THE CROWD

PM attended the **World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** in Marseille last September. The Congress brought together a range of stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, scientists, business, indigenous people and the public, to discuss the state of nature and how it can be protected. Our mission was to ensure the recognition of population growth as a key driver of biodiversity loss. So, what levels of awareness, support – or denial – did we encounter?

Our eye-catching stand, which highlighted the empowering population solutions that already exist to tackle population growth, attracted many visitors. It was gratifying to meet so many people from all over the world who not only got our population message, but also were delighted that someone was talking about the issue openly.

## QUESTIONS ASKED, CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED

During the four-day Forum, which provided a hub for public debate, PM attended several events and asked questions of the speakers. Some responses were supportive of PM's position, whereas others completely side-stepped the population issue. This highlighted both the challenge we face in getting policymakers to acknowledge population growth as a driver of biodiversity loss, and the importance for us of engaging at such events to find new friends and supporters.

As an IUCN member, PM was invited to the IUCN European Regional Members' meeting, which saw the launch of the new IUCN Europe Programme 2021 – 2024. Thanks to our input into the draft version last June, human population growth is now mentioned: *"The current societal production and consumption patterns, especially in the Global North, including the EU, coupled with a growing human population, have exceeded our planetary boundaries and accelerated the biodiversity crisis."*

Transformative change will only be possible if all factors driving biodiversity loss and nature degradation are taken into account. The highlighting of population growth in this important IUCN report is therefore a very welcome step – and Population Matters stands ready to assist with the development and implementation of the programme over the coming months and years.

**Population may not have been on the official agenda at COP26, but we found a good number of friends supporting us.**



Big Baby dominates Glasgow Green as PM's Monica Scigliano is interviewed by the media at COP26.

## THREE DECADES OF COP – WHAT'S BEEN ACHIEVED?

Following the IUCN event, last November, PM Director Robin Maynard led a four-strong team at the **26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP26)** – convened to accelerate action towards the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement, including limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. For nearly three decades, the UN has been bringing together

the world's nations for these global climate summits. In that time, climate change has gone from being a fringe issue to a global priority.

World leaders arrived in Glasgow, alongside thousands of negotiators, government representatives, businesses and citizens, for two weeks of talks – but it was not just another international summit – most experts believed that COP26 had a unique urgency. So, what was achieved – and what recognition was there for the population issue and neglected, positive solutions?

While population may not have been on the official agenda, PM succeeded in raising the issue on several occasions and in the media;

and we found a good number of friends supporting us – especially delegates from the Global South.

## MEDIA COVERAGE ACROSS THE WORLD

We focused on a selection of key events, and a hit-list of NGO representatives, policymakers and officials to make contact with. We also had our own set pieces organised to gain public



# international stage

and media attention – the most prominent of those being an outing for our 7-metre high, inflatable ‘Big Baby’ on Glasgow Green. Bold pink and wearing a bib bearing the message ‘Smaller Families, Cooler Planet’, Big Baby’s purpose was to draw attention to the significant contribution that individuals, especially in rich, high-consuming, high-emitting countries such as the UK, can make to curbing climate change by choosing to have a smaller family. Big Baby did his job, gaining media coverage across the world.

## MAKING THE POPULATION CASE

While the relationship between population and climate change is complex, investing in empowering population solutions is undeniably positive and key to averting disaster. There should be a synergy between women’s rights, population growth and climate change – and this was raised at a World Health Organisation fringe meeting, entitled ‘Building the nexus between climate change, family planning, reproductive health, population, environment and development’.

Opening the session, Dr Eliya Zulu, director of the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) and the keynote speaker at PM’s 2021 Conference, observed that, apart from at this meeting, the issue of population was barely on the agenda: “If you go around this COP or previous conferences, the ‘p’ word, as I call it, seems to be forbidden”.

Following on, Nancy Tembo, Malawi’s Minister of Forestry and Natural Resources, spoke unequivocally: “Malawi is highly populated, highly vulnerable to climate change – we have rapid population growth. This is a recipe for disaster.” In stark contrast to the deeply judgemental assertion then raised that family planning was only a climate adaptation strategy, not a mitigation strategy, she went on to say: “Unless we address issues of reproductive health and population, we will not achieve anything... Addressing gender and population growth needs to be at the centre of climate mitigation and adaptation.”

It was very disappointing that COP26 as a whole, while making progress, did not steer humanity away from the cliff edge of runaway climate change. Much more work over the coming decade must therefore be done to ensure that the planet can be protected for all living things.

## ACT NOW TO SAVE BIODIVERSITY

**POPULATION MATTERS**

Biodiversity loss is accelerating. The extinction rate is now so high that scientists have established that we are in the midst of a sixth mass extinction driven by human activity. To prevent further biodiversity loss, we must address the impact of our growing human population. In the run-up to the summit later in the year in Kunming, China, when a new international agreement will be adopted to combat global biodiversity loss, Population Matters is running a new **new e-action** campaign to call for positive, choice-based population solutions to be included. To find out how to send a personal message to the environment minister in your country, visit [populationmatters.org/cbd-cop15](https://populationmatters.org/cbd-cop15).



PM’s Andrew Howard arrives at the Congress in Marseille. Olivia Nater meets up with one of our Empower to Plan partners, Women for Conservation, at the PM stand.



Population Matters was there as world leaders and thousands of negotiators, government representatives, businesses and citizens, gathered in Glasgow for two weeks of talks.



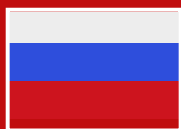
## POLITICS, POWER AND POPULATION

The *Welcome to Gilead* report connects the statements politicians and political influencers make on population with their actions on sexual and reproductive health and rights, which makes for disturbing reading.

### RUSSIA: THE MOTHERLAND NEEDS MORE MOTHERS

*"Russia's fate and its historic prospects depend on how many of us there are... it depends on how many children are born in Russian families."*

Russian President Vladimir Putin



### IRAN: FERTILITY AS A WEAPON

*"The enemy has been implementing a consistent plan to reduce the birth rate."*

Iranian parliamentarian Nasrollah Pejmanfar



### CHINA: A STATE AFFAIR

*"The birth of a baby is not only a matter of the family itself, but also a state affair."*

People's Daily, China's official newspaper



### TURKEY: THREE-PLUS CHILDREN FOR THE ECONOMY

*"[Abortions and caesarean sections are] secret plots designed to stall Turkey's economic growth and a conspiracy to wipe the Turkish nation from the world stage."*

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 2012



### HUNGARY: DEMOGRAPHY IS DESTINY

*"Europe, our common homeland, [is] losing out in the population competition between great civilisations... In the struggle for the future of Europe, stopping illegal migration is imperative... This struggle ... is only worthwhile if we are able to combine it with a family policy that restores natural reproduction on the continent."*

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán



### POLAND: WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW WON'T TEMPT YOU

*"In Germany, billions of euros are spent on support for immigrants, but here these billions of zlotys are spent on Polish families... This is a revolutionary socio-demographic project, and we are proud of it."*

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki



# WELCOME

PM's major new report is the first comprehensive account of the way in which the drive for more babies can lead to control, abuse and suffering. The report's author, **Monica Scigliano**, reveals the shocking truth...

**THE IDEA OF COERCIVE** population policies brings to mind China's one-child policy, introduced in the 1980s to address the rapid growth rate of the country's population, and India's dark history of forced sterilisations. Now, however, with the populations of many countries starting to decline, the goal has shifted. A growing number of politicians are pushing pronatalist policies, which, instead of promoting fewer children, actively encourage women to have more. And while pronatalism – the promotion of childbirth – is not, in and of itself, coercive, there's an unsettling picture emerging.

Rights-affirming versions of pronatalism, such as providing more statutory parental leave, rarely result in significantly higher birth rates. Therefore, some politicians are turning to a more extreme, politically convenient, and less expensive strategy: restricting women's reproductive rights, often framed within a moralistic 'pro-family' agenda and underpinned by a patriarchal worldview in which women must stay home and bear children.

### STATEMENTS OF INTENT

With its title referring to Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, PM's major new report, *Welcome to Gilead*, investigates the alarming rise in extreme pronatalism through eight case studies: Iran, China, Turkey, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Germany, and the US, connecting the statements politicians and political influencers make on population with their actions on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Across these examples, we find that coercive pronatalism is not simply a manifestation of patriarchy or misogyny but can be a product of political and economic forces entirely indifferent to women, who exist for them simply as productive or non-productive wombs. The concerns fuelling pronatalism are varied, intertwined and sometimes difficult to ascribe with certainty. In many cases, a combination of factors is at play.

Some leaders worry that a low birth rate will make their economies less competitive and are uneasy about the economic costs of supporting an ageing population. A number of conservative American lawmakers, for example, aim to make abortion illegal and contraception more costly while also warning of the 'disastrous' economic effects of low birth rates.



# TO GILEAD

China's leadership is particularly concerned about the effects of demographic change on its labour force. According to American journalist Leta Hong Fincher: *"The Chinese government aggressively perpetuates traditional gender norms and reduces women to their roles as dutiful wives, mothers and baby breeders in the home, to minimise social unrest and give birth to future generations of skilled workers... policymakers continue to view women primarily as reproductive tools to realise the nation's development goals."*

In Turkey, a blend of economic concerns and nationalism fuel President Erdoğan's intense pronatalism. He has called abortions *"secret plots designed to stall Turkey's economic growth and a conspiracy to wipe the Turkish nation from the world stage."*

## MORE OF US, NOT THEM

In some cases, governments separately encourage population growth among the majority group while discouraging it among minorities, whom they see as a threat. China, for instance, focuses its increasingly coercive pronatalism on educated, middle class Han people, while subjecting minorities like Uyghurs to forced long-term contraception and abortions.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is explicit in his selective desire for population growth: *"Instead of just numbers, we want Hungarian children."* He, like a number of politicians in Eastern Europe, is a subscriber to the 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory, which believes white Christian European culture is being exterminated through immigration and high birth rates among minorities, especially Muslims. For these nationalistic pronatalists, demonising migrants and promoting 'native' births are two sides of the same coin.

Some, like Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei and Russia's Putin, see low fertility rates (particularly among the religious or ethnic majority group) as a national security threat. Iran, for instance, recently tasked its Ministry of Intelligence with monitoring abortion. The Russian government, meanwhile, is considering labelling the childfree movement an 'extremist ideology', and President Putin has stated that *"Russia's fate and its historic prospects... depends on how many children are born in Russian families."*

## FROM PULPIT TO POLITICS

Even Pope Francis has weighed in on demographic change. Refusing parenthood, according to the leader of the billion-strong Catholic Church, makes people "lesser" and causes entire countries to "suffer" as they become older. Indeed, the Vatican has intervened in many countries and intergovernmental organisations in an attempt to limit contraception and abortion or maintain existing restrictions. Just one year ago, Poland enacted a draconian law, drafted by Catholic NGO *Ordo Iuris* which has infiltrated the Polish government, that almost entirely bans abortion, even in cases of foetal abnormality.



**In some cases, governments separately encourage population growth among the majority group while discouraging it among minorities, whom they see as a threat.**

In the report's foreword, Antonina Lewandowska of the Federation for Women and Family Planning, Poland, states: *"The Polish pronatalist movement drove doctors into such a state of fear that they would rather let a patient go into septic shock than terminate the pregnancy earlier and save her life. It is clear: aggressive, nationalist pronatalism has paved the way for human rights violations in Poland."*

## A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In each of the countries explored in the report, reproductive rights are under attack by the same politicians who >>

### GERMANY: CHILDREN FOR THE GERMAN RACE

*"Germany's negative demographic trend has to be counteracted. Mass immigration has a high potential for conflict and is not a viable economic solution. The only mid- and long-term solution is to attain a higher birth rate by the native population by stimulating family policies."*

German political party *Alternative für Deutschland*



### UNITED STATES: PRO-LIFE... UNTIL BIRTH

*"Preventing babies from being born is not medicine. That's not constructive to our culture and our civilization. If we let our birth rate get down below the replacement rate, we are a dying civilization."*

Former US Congressman Steve King





>> aim to increase birth rates. Iran has recently outlawed free contraceptives and elective sterilisation. In China, childfree men are often unable to obtain vasectomies.

The AKP, Turkey's ruling party, has made contraception difficult to access in much of the country. In Russia, women have to go through a longer waiting period and biased counselling, sometimes with a priest, before they are granted an abortion. Hungary has made medical abortion illegal and requires a prescription for emergency contraception.

## THE BATTLE RAGES

Germany and the US – the most democratic countries featured in the report – aren't spared, either. While the German government doesn't seek to restrict women's rights, a Nazi-era law in Germany has, until just recently, prevented healthcare providers from publicising information on abortions. In the US, as the Supreme Court debates the most important abortion case in decades (see page 5), the battle for the right to abortion rages in a number of American states.

The evidence is clear and compelling. None of these politicians care about global population numbers: they only want population growth among certain groups – whether Muslims, Christians, their 'native' populations or others – in order to gain political, military, or economic power. Unbelievably, nefarious abuses committed in the name of saving humanity from low birth rates aren't limited to the fictional pages of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

## TAKING UP THE FIGHT AGAINST EXTREME PRONATALISM

Population Matters is deeply aware of the dark history of coercion, racism and eugenics in policies intended to limit population growth. The need for vigilance against such abuses remains. However, a fixation on the antinatalist coercion of the past may prevent defenders of reproductive rights from recognising and effectively countering the reproductive rights violations of today, which are putting people's health, freedom and lives at stake.

Gender equality and full sexual and reproductive health and rights are embedded across international human rights and development frameworks, and significant – though far from enough – progress has been made in recent decades. But those rights cannot be realised unless the threats posed by coercive pronatalism are properly understood, and everyone who seeks to defend women's and reproductive rights unites to defend them.

**The *Welcome to Gilead* report concludes with recommendations for policymakers and the SRHR community to:**

- **Uphold, defend and campaign for women's rights and reproductive rights, including by making contraception affordable and universally available and removing barriers to elective abortions.**
- **Recognise pronatal rhetoric in politics as a risk factor for future SRHR restrictions, and that non-coercive pronatalist policies, if perceived to be unsuccessful, can be followed by more restrictive efforts.**



Photo by Leszek Szymanski/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

■ **Recognise political rhetoric targeting immigrants, ethnic or religious minorities and multiculturalism as a risk factor for pronatal policies that could lead to SRHR restrictions.**

■ **Publicly condemn the manifestations of pronatalism that are fuelling reproductive rights violations, and expose the nationalism, xenophobia, and misogyny at their core.**

■ **Recognise the 'population decline crisis' narrative as a potential contributor to coercive pronatal rhetoric and policies.** Where appropriate, highlight the existence of policy solutions which are not dependent on pronatal policies.

■ **Recognise that emphasis on 'coercive population control' by pronatal campaigners and politicians can be used to disguise and advance their goals and deflect attention from their aims and activities.**

Recognise that the modern argument for reducing and ending population growth is firmly committed to human rights and the empowerment of women.

## FIND OUT MORE

To download and read the report in full, visit [populationmatters.org/Welcome-to-Gilead-report](https://populationmatters.org/Welcome-to-Gilead-report).





**NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME**, Elon Musk has urged people to have more babies, claiming that ‘population collapse’ is the biggest threat facing humanity. This statement is not only absurd, but dangerous.

At a *Wall Street Journal* event last December, the Tesla CEO stated: “I think one of the biggest risks to civilisation is the low birth rate and the rapidly declining birth rate. So many people, including smart people, think that there are too many people in the world and think that the population is growing out of control. It’s completely the opposite. Please look at the numbers – if people don’t have more children, civilisation is going to crumble, mark my words.”

### IRRATIONAL FEAR

Musk, a father-of-six with a net worth close to USD \$300 billion, has expressed his irrational fear of small family size several times to his 66.2 million followers on Twitter. Many of these are die-hard ‘Musketeers’ – mostly young men – who latch on to his every word. But more billionaire babies and a push to reverse the hard-won decrease in the global fertility rate (the average number of children per woman) are the opposite of what the world needs right now.

### AMPLIFYING A MYTH

While he expresses it in unusually apocalyptic terms, Musk is far from alone in articulating a sense of panic based on falling birth rates in some countries. The mainstream media is increasingly amplifying the baby bust narrative.

A powerful example is BBC Radio 4’s flagship *Rethink Population* series, which unpromisingly started with a clip of Musk himself.

Over more than three hours of programme time, the supposed perils of lower birth rates were minutely dissected, and their advantages almost totally neglected.

Perhaps five minutes in total looked at the environmental consequences, with only a handful of speakers talking about women’s empowerment.

As a result of all this talk, many people now think that our population has stopped growing or has even begun to shrink. Musk needs to heed his own advice and look at the numbers.



## Why the mainstream population debate is missing the point

Tech billionaire Elon Musk may have been named *TIME*’s person of the year, 2021, but his recent comments could not be more out of time, argues **Olivia Nater**.

### 7.9 BILLION AND COUNTING

The hard facts show that we’re still adding around 80 million people to our ranks every year. According to the UN’s projections, there’s currently only a one-in-four chance of our population stabilising before the end of the century. With close to 8 billion people currently on Earth and most likely heading towards 9.7 billion by 2050 and 10.9 billion by 2100, it’s a hugely unsustainable situation.

**As a result of all this talk, many people now think that our population has stopped growing, or has even begun to shrink.**

Together with overconsumption in wealthy nations (not least by billionaires), human population growth is a primary driver of all our current environmental crises, from climate warming to resource depletion and food security issues to the sixth mass extinction.

### FALLING FERTILITY IS GOOD

As Prof Sarah Harper, who spoke at our recent Boom or Bust? conference

(see page 6) succinctly put it on the *Rethink* programme: “Falling fertility is good: it’s good for the planet, it’s good for communities and good for women.”

Musk’s fearmongering could not come at a worse time. The real looming danger of ‘collapse’ is in relation to our ecosystems and women’s and reproductive rights. If our civilisation does “crumble”, it will be due to our failure to safeguard human rights and end population growth and overconsumption – and that’s what really should be the headline debate.

### GET THE REAL STORY



Population Matters campaigns to raise awareness of the issues surrounding population and the promotion of practical, positive, rights-based solutions, as revealed in our latest reports (see page 10 and page 14). Keep up to date with our work by joining our mailing list at [populationmatters.org/newsletter](https://populationmatters.org/newsletter).

To read our *Rethink Population* radio debate analysis in full visit [populationmatters.org/news/2022/01/bbc-population-re-treading-well-worn-path](https://populationmatters.org/news/2022/01/bbc-population-re-treading-well-worn-path).

**Population Matters'** major new report on ageing delivers a comprehensive challenge to the prevailing narrative that ageing populations spell economic disaster and calls for common sense solutions, writes **Alistair Currie.**

# SILVER *Linings...*

Photo by Marisa Hovenstine on Unsplash

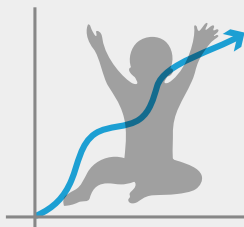


**HEADLINES ABOUT** 'Jaw-Dropping Crashes' in birth rates and a 'silver tsunami' of old people threatening to overwhelm government budgets and leave millions of job vacancies unfilled have led to calls for action to boost birth rates across the world. However, this flawed perspective makes unfounded assumptions and ignores the reality of how this demographic shift could actually play out. *Silver Linings, Not Silver Burdens*, Population Matters' major new report, finds that falling birth rates offer multiple advantages, and the increasing number of old people is neither an imminent crisis nor an insoluble problem.

This in-depth, 30-page report, backed by more than 100 references, and with a foreword by economist and former chair of the UK's Climate Change Committee, Lord Adair Turner, provides detailed, research-based insight, delivering a significant contribution to the public debate on ageing. Here, you'll find a summary of three of the report's key myth-busting narratives.

## MYTH!

### 1 Economies need an expanding birth rate to be successful



While it's right for poorer countries to grow their economies as part of the process of escaping poverty, in richer countries that growth in production and consumption is a key driver of our environmental crisis.

To address this, the report calls for a reorientation of economic priorities, away from constant growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which benefits from an expanding birth rate and growing population.

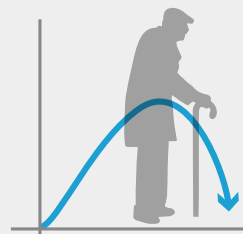
It notes that GDP places no value on the natural world and on human activities which don't involve economic transactions.

Transitioning to a wellbeing economy would not only ensure that quality of humans' lives and protection of the natural world are the drivers of all economic activity, but it would also help us to recognise the value of investing in older people.

As for the need for more workers, globally hundreds of millions of people who want work are not in paid employment, and automation is likely to mean fewer jobs are available.

## MYTH!

### 2 Older people are just a drain on the economy



The report finds that the economic value of older people is hardly recognised in discussions on the issue. In 2016/17 (the most recent estimate available), Age UK calculated that people over 65 contributed around £160 billion to the UK economy, including through paid work, volunteering and caring for grandchildren while the middle generation went to work (such babysitting was estimated to be worth £7.7 billion to the UK economy).

Despite this, the 'old age dependency ratio' which is often used as an indicator of the problem, treats all people over 65 as economically unproductive, and takes no account of the economic costs of children, who are truly economically dependent. As birth rates fall, their cost to the economy is reduced.

In addition, the overall impact of ageing alone on health budgets is relatively low and will take place gradually. It has been calculated that ageing alone will add just 1% to per capita health care expenditure over the next 40 years. Meanwhile, practical and effective measures are already being taken across the world to make pensions fit for the challenges of the 21st century, and the pace of reform must be maintained.



# ...*not* SILVER BURDENS



Population Matters believes that it's time for policymakers to embrace population ageing as a stepping stone towards a better future for people and planet – and we're committed to challenging the simplistic narrative on ageing and lower birth rates that simply doesn't look at the evidence. Yes, an ageing population is a challenge – but our environmental problems are a crisis. We can manage a world with more old people, but a world of soaring temperatures and crashing biodiversity threatens far more than pension budgets and the bottom line.

We already have all the tools required and we can use them under any economic system, including the current one. However, a reorientation of economic priorities towards wellbeing and sustainability would help us to recognise the true human value of this enterprise. Getting old in health and security is a privilege, and one we hope we and our children and grandchildren will all get to do on a healthy planet.

## MYTH!

### 3 An ageing population is something to fear



Previous studies have shown that fears of population ageing are usually unfounded. After all, ageing is a sign of our success in improving living conditions, economic security and health.

It's no surprise that people living in ageing societies generally do better economically, socially, and environmentally than people in fast-growing countries with a high proportion of young dependents.

The proportion of UK citizens aged 65 and over has increased from one in 10 people in 1950 to almost one in five today. By 2050, this is expected to increase to a quarter of the population. However, thanks to advances in modern medicine, a 65-year-old today generally has a greater fitness level than a 65-year-old in 1950.

Greater investment in preventative medicine – which is significantly underfunded everywhere – will make more older people healthier. Many already work past the current state pension age and the most cited reason is not yet feeling ready to retire. This delayed retirement trend is helping to counteract the economic effects of population ageing.

## £160bn

In the UK, the economic contribution of people over 65 was estimated in 2016/17 to be £160bn. It's likely that, in 2021, the total contribution exceeds the UK government's pension bill.



## 188%

The number of over-65s in work in the UK increased by 188% between 1999 and 2019. An average man aged 70 in the UK will have as many years of life left as a man of 65 did in 1997.



## 1%

Changes in population age structure alone are expected to add no more than one additional percentage point to the average annual per person health care expenditure growth rates in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries over the next 40 years. According to the Office for National Statistics, economic dependency has declined in the UK since 1992, despite the ageing of the population.



## 0.2%

In the EU, it's estimated that the average increase in pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP over the next 40 years will be less than 0.2% per year.



## READ OUR NEW REPORT IN FULL

You can download it by visiting:

[populationmatters.org/news/2021/10/pm-report-exposes-ageing-myth](https://populationmatters.org/news/2021/10/pm-report-exposes-ageing-myth)



# Practical, positive partner

**Catriona Spaven-Donn** reports on how, thanks to your support, our **Empower to Plan** partners are leading the way in sexual and reproductive health and education provision in their communities.

## Helping a team of local change makers – Na’leb’ak – to empower girls and engage communities about family planning in Guatemala.

**IN THE TROPICAL REGION** of Chisec in north-eastern Guatemala, a group of indigenous Maya Q’eqchi’ young women is empowering girls to make decisions about their lives and communities for the prevention of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy. As Na’leb’ak’s Project Coordinator, Karla Rax, explains: “In 2015, when the Population Council programme in our community was going to end, we knew we had to organise ourselves to keep providing services to vulnerable girls in Chisec. With no substantive plan in place to improve opportunities for youth, it was down to us – we had to do something.”

And they certainly did. In 2017, Na’leb’ak became a legally constituted NGO (non-governmental organisation) with a team of around 20 Maya Q’eqchi’ community mentors. They now work in 25 communities with 50 groups of girls aged between 8–12 and 13–25 years old, engaging almost 1,000 children and adolescents in the Chisec region.

In October last year, PM partnered with Na’leb’ak, which means “a collective dialogue to reach a consensus” in the Q’eqchi’ language. With Empower to Plan support, the Na’leb’ak team has been able to provide sex education workshops to 80 girls in three of the communities most affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota, which tore through the region in November 2020.

### CREATING SAFE SPACES

In Seraxquen, a small rural community nestled into the mountains and tropical jungle, 25 girls have been receiving sex education sessions every week, learning about contraceptive methods, reproductive rights and self-esteem building.



Na’leb’ak’s monitoring mentor, Eunice Cojoc, says: “A lot of the time there’s no possibility for independence or empowerment in the home. Girls’ dreams are cut short. We work



to provide safe spaces where girls can express themselves, ask questions and feel comfortable talking about topics like menstruation, sex and pregnancy.”

### SOWING THE SEEDS FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

While Covid shut down schools and educational access, the hurricanes wiped away crops and ruined livelihoods. Over a year later, parts of the communities where Na’leb’ak works are still underwater. Empower to Plan funding has also supported the creation of 65 diversified vegetable gardens, which Na’leb’ak programme participants have sown and nurtured to strengthen local food security and climate resilience.

One of the participants, Eva, has at least 20 different crops growing from organic seeds that Na’leb’ak community mentors provided. Although part of her land is now a lagoon of water, she’s still producing a huge variety of native fruit and vegetables – and shifting gender norms about the role of women in farming.

Na’leb’ak exemplifies the qualities that Empower to Plan seeks to support: a women-led team of local change-makers who are educating and empowering girls to the benefit of themselves, their communities and the vulnerable ecosystem that they call home.



# ships for change

# EMPOWER TO PLAN

Photo courtesy of Women for Conservation



## Empower to Plan's crowdfunding for Women for Conservation in Colombia has had an incredible impact.

**PM'S RECENT SUCCESSFUL** funding campaign for Women for Conservation in Colombia achieved tangible impact for women seeking family planning and communities, protecting areas of high biodiversity.

Over a six-month period, 213 women attended family planning workshops to learn about different contraceptive methods and 132 women chose to receive implants. Practical conservation workshops in and around nature reserves engaged 201 participants on themes such as reforestation, endangered frog conservation, native plants and environmental management. Meanwhile, 656 women and young people, including local schoolchildren, received environmental education training.

## Supporting EPIC Assist and You Before Two to engage marginalised groups in the UK on healthy relationships.

**THE EMPOWER TO PLAN** facilitated collaboration between Scottish youth charity, EPIC Assist, and sex education charity, You Before Two, has engaged children and youth in marginalised areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow. In January, a workshop on consent, healthy relationships, contraception and population growth was facilitated to a group of 11 adolescents at the YSortIt youth centre in West Dunbartonshire. Over the coming months, they'll be working with Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities in the UK to create safe spaces to talk about sex, early pregnancy and gender-based violence.

To donate to this unique series of workshops, facilitated by experts in their field, please visit [populationmatters.org/epic-you-before-two-collaborative-workshops](https://populationmatters.org/epic-you-before-two-collaborative-workshops).

Candace Thomas and You Before Two founder and PM Expert Adviser, Dr Rebecca Foljambe, lead the workshops.



## Supporting Rajasthan Rising to reverse the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy in India.



**IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES** to Na'leb'ak in rural Guatemala, Rajasthan Rising was established as a response to the lack of institutional support for girls, in an area with the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy in the country. Beginning with a group of just 10 girl leaders at the start of the pandemic, Rajasthan Rising quickly grew into a burgeoning movement of 5,000 girls. They are advocating for free access to education while aiming to reduce rates of child marriage and pregnancy in their state.

PM's Empower to Plan partnership is engaging 20 new girl leaders in weekly training sessions on themes of sexual and reproductive rights and climate justice. Each girl will then lead a community engagement project in her local village to shift attitudes and behaviours of elders, family-members and neighbours on girls' education, early marriage and gender-based violence.

To read more about Rajasthan Rising, turn to our Q&A with one of the original 10 girl leaders of the movement, Vineeta Meena, on page 19.

**Rajasthan Rising has reached 71% of their crowdfunding target in record time. To donate and help this inspirational organisation reach their goal, please head to [populationmatters.org/rajasthan-rising](https://populationmatters.org/rajasthan-rising).**

Photo courtesy of Rajasthan Rising

## YOUR SUPPORT IS TRANSFORMING LIVES



PM's innovative scheme uses the power of crowdfunding to support grassroots NGOs that are delivering rights-based family planning healthcare and education services. We've some exciting upcoming project launches, which will empower girls, women and entire communities in Afghanistan, Eastern Europe and Venezuela. For more details of our Empower to Plan partners, visit [populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan](https://populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan). Also check out our new Empower to Plan video at [youtube.com/watch?v=MijvXkqMwcs](https://youtube.com/watch?v=MijvXkqMwcs).

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Foljambe

# Aid cuts are causing the deepest wounds to women

**Olivia Nater** reports on how the cuts to foreign aid are wiping out decades of progress towards gender equality.



Photo by Luis Galvez on Unsplash

**THE UK HAS BEEN** a champion of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), playing a leading role in the development of the Family Planning 2020 initiative which aimed to enable an additional 120 million women to use modern contraception by 2020 (although this only reached half its target). It's also been one of the biggest funders of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the largest provider of free contraceptives and reproductive health services in crisis areas. However, the UK is a champion no more.

In November 2020, the UK Government announced a reduction in its foreign development aid from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%. Global family planning was one of the areas worst affected by the cuts.

With UK funding for UNFPA now reduced by a staggering 85% or £130 million relative to the previous year, the organisation estimated this would lead to around 250,000 additional maternal and child deaths, 14.6 million unintended pregnancies and 4.3 million unsafe abortions.

A new report – *Just the Numbers: Impact of UK Sexual and Reproductive Health Funding for Family Planning, Fiscal Year 2021–2022* – released by the Guttmacher Institute, a US-based research and policy organisation committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (which was also affected by the cuts), uses a different methodology. Based on surveys of 12 major reproductive health organisations, it estimates total cuts of £132.4 million for the year from April 2021 to March 2022.

The authors calculate that this would result in 4.3 million more unintended pregnancies, 1.4 million

more unsafe abortions and 8,000 more maternal deaths. According to the report, more than half of the affected women are likely to be in sub-Saharan Africa, and a quarter in Southern Asia.

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Regardless of which estimates you look at, the impact of the cuts on women and girls' lives is horrific. It's also a huge, missed opportunity. Investment in SRH services is one of the most powerful levers for sustainable development due to its hugely beneficial impact on communities and the environment. When women and girls are empowered to choose if and when they have children, their health and wellbeing drastically improve and child mortality plummets too. Average family size also decreases, meaning children, especially girls, have better prospects, the impact of population growth on the environment lessens, and entire communities become more resilient and prosperous.

A 2014 assessment by the Copenhagen Consensus Center found that every one US Dollar invested in achieving universal access to SRH services yields a \$120 benefit. A 2019 Guttmacher report estimated that fulfilling the unmet need for modern contraception in developing countries would save \$16 billion a year in maternal healthcare by reducing the number of unintended pregnancies.

Access to contraception alone is often not enough to improve uptake as women in low-mid-income countries mostly aren't free to choose what happens to their bodies and lives. Therefore, family planning aid is

particularly effective when combined with efforts to advance women's rights. The UN estimates that ending the worst gender inequalities, including the unmet need for family planning, requires a \$264 billion investment – so far, only 16% of this has been pledged.

## CAMPAIGNING AGAINST CUTS

Population Matters has been campaigning against the harmful aid cuts, writing to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and organising a petition which thousands of people have now signed. Foreign SRH assistance should not be seen as competing with national concerns – when women and girls are empowered, the whole world benefits. Support us at [populationmatters.org/campaigns](https://populationmatters.org/campaigns).

## THE GENDER GAP

■ The proportion of women and girls older than 15 subjected to **physical or sexual violence** has remained unchanged for over a decade, with still one-in-three affected globally – a staggering **736 million** in 2020.\*\*

■ With the pandemic also disrupting efforts to halt **female genital mutilation (FGM)**, the number of additional girls expected to be cut by 2030 will likely increase by **2 million**.\*

■ Out of 95 countries assessed, three quarters do not set the minimum age at marriage at 18, and the pandemic will likely lead to **10 million additional child brides** by 2030.\*\*

\* Source: UNFPA statement on UK aid cuts, April 2021, [unfpa.org/press/statement-uk-government-funding-cuts](https://unfpa.org/press/statement-uk-government-funding-cuts)

\*\* Source: UN's 2021 Gender Snapshot



## Q&A with Vineeta Meena

**Rajasthan Rising** launched during the Covid lockdown of 2020 when 10 girls came together to campaign for access to education and an end to child marriage. One of the group's first leaders, **Vineeta Meena**, explains how it's now a movement of 5,000 girls and growing...

**Q: What are the organisation's key aims and objectives?**

**A:** Our movement began with a shared purpose of ensuring every girl has access to fair and equitable education. We want every girl to be aware of this right and demand it. Our first main goal is for the government of Rajasthan to drop school development fees across state government schools. This would enable girls from poor socio-economic households to get an education. Our second goal is for the government to increase the availability of scholarships for girls from marginalised households. And finally, we want to end gender and caste-based discrimination in our society.

**Q: How have you managed to grow the movement?**

**A:** We started with a group of 10 girls in a small block of the Karauli district in Rajasthan. We built our leadership skills and started by recruiting girl leaders in 50 villages. Each of us took responsibility for recruiting, identifying and developing 10 girl leaders across five villages and those girl leaders further mobilised 10 girls per village. Within months, our movement was 1,500 girls strong in one block of the State. We then put out a call for more girls to join in other districts with help from NGO partners such as AMIED, which supports children of educationally deprived rural populations. Within a year, we were able to replicate the model across other districts of Rajasthan and become a movement that's now 5,000 girls strong.

**Q: What changes have you seen at community level in relation to girls' education and early marriage?**

**A:** Girls have greater awareness, agency and mobility, as well as the power to demand their rights – especially the right to education and convincing their families of the value of education. Some of these girls were not able to voice their opinions within the family space before, but now are even placing their demands

in front of political leaders. We've also seen a shift at community level in the attitude of village elders, with greater recognition of the importance of girls staying in school. During the pandemic, there was an increase in child marriage, but our movement has been able to shift mindsets on this issue. Several girls who were going to be married are now part of the movement and advocate for staying in education rather than entering into early marriage.

**Q: What difference does it make to the lives of women and girls to be empowered to stand up for their rights and challenge deep-rooted social norms?**

**A:** This is one of the most important impacts of our movement. We believe that no one is going to stand up, speak or fight for us – we have to do it for ourselves. Each of us has been through many struggles just to join Rajasthan Rising and become part of the movement. It's very challenging as we're standing up against age-old patriarchal and casteist norms, but it gives us a sense of purpose and hope for our future.

The ability to make decisions about your body, health and life is every girl's right. Many of us in the movement had no idea about the impact that child marriage and giving birth at an early age could have on our bodies. Now, other girls are aware of these issues too and I'm excited to see the change in attitude and confidence of girls who have become leaders.

**Q: How is the partnership with PM's Empower to Plan supporting your work?**

**A:** It will support us in building more girl leaders who will in turn strengthen and grow our movement. Through this programme, girl leaders will initiate unique projects in their villages and bring about change for their communities. We also believe it's an opportunity to learn more about the issues around sexual rights and climate justice – both critical issues that will shape all our futures.



Photo courtesy of Vineeta Meena

### ISING TO THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A GIRL IN RAJASTHAN

■ 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India each year. Rajasthan has among the highest rates of child marriage in the country, as well as the lowest literacy rates – less than 60% of women here can read and write and more than 40% have never attended school.

■ A significant proportion of the population belongs to the Dalit and other disadvantaged communities, known as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The educational and socioeconomic indicators for these groups are much lower than other populations in Rajasthan. Working to change this discrepancy is one of Rajasthan Rising's central goals.

■ With the support of Empower to Plan funding, Rajasthan Rising is engaging 20 adolescent girls in five months of leadership training. The workshops focus on the intersections of sexual and reproductive rights and climate change. At the end of the training period, each girl will plan and implement a project in her local community, such as leading public awareness campaigns against child marriage.

■ For more about our partners, visit [populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan](https://populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan).

# POPULATION MATTERS

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## PUSHING FOR A FAIRER WORLD



**WHEN IT COMES TO OUR  
HUMAN POPULATION ON  
THIS ONE, HABITABLE  
PLANET, LESS IS MORE**



**MORE SPACE FOR NATURE,  
FOR OTHER SPECIES,  
FOR LIFE-SUPPORTING  
ECOSYSTEMS**



**MORE OPPORTUNITY,  
INCREASED WELLBEING  
AND FAIRER SHARES FOR  
PEOPLE EVERYWHERE**

**"Greater opportunities and wider horizons for people leaves more space for nature. Future generations will grow up in a regenerating, species-diverse world sustained by resilient ecosystems. That's the vision we can offer and the change we must make possible."**

**Robin Maynard, Executive Director**

**DISCOVER MORE AT [POPULATIONMATTERS.ORG](https://populationmatters.org)**

Population Matters campaigns to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people's lives. We support human rights, women's empowerment and global justice. We believe that to be able to live within our planet's limits, everyone must be empowered to choose a smaller family.

