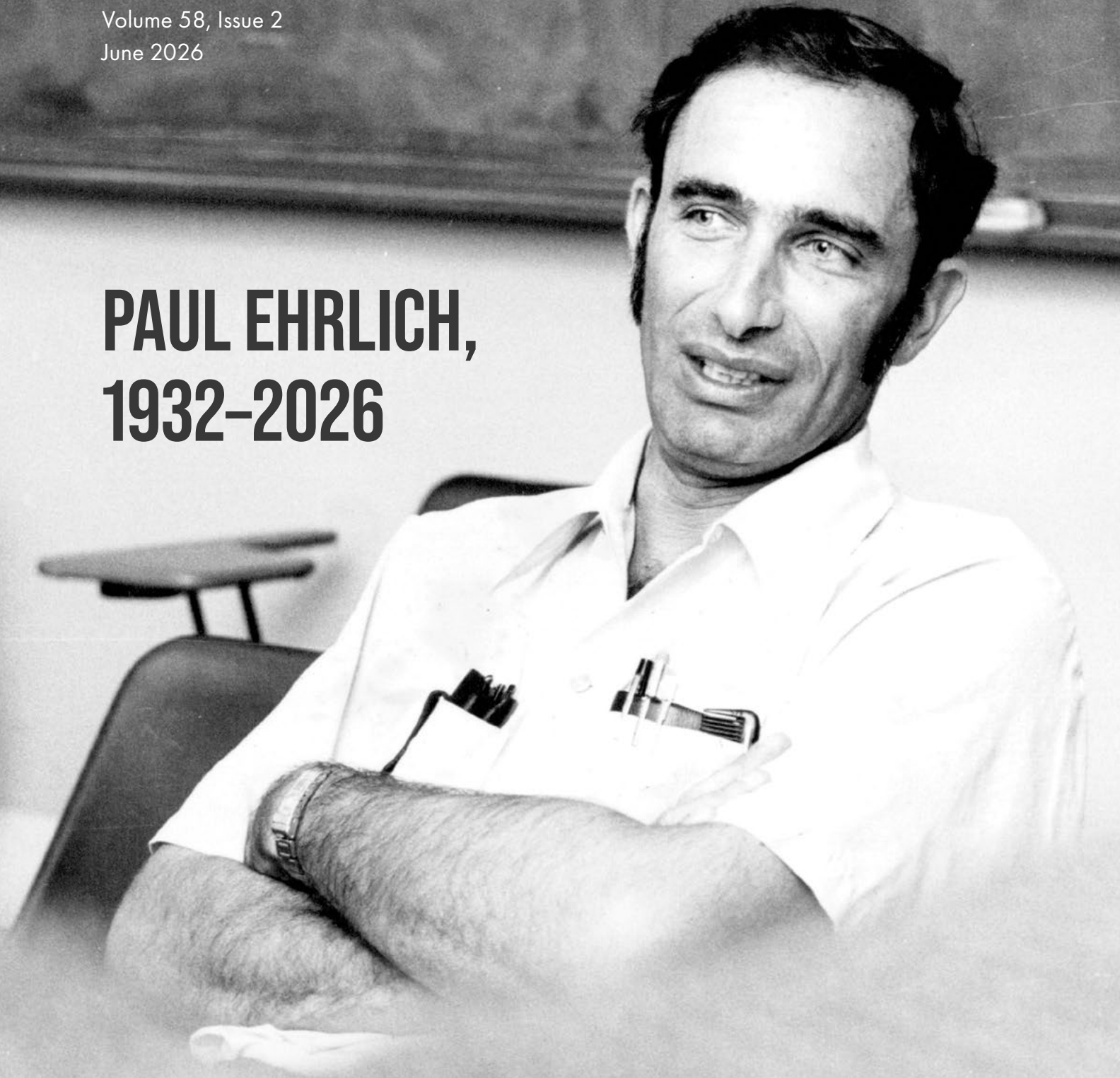


POPULATION CONNECTION

Volume 58, Issue 2
June 2026

**PAUL EHRLICH,
1932-2026**



President's Note

John Seager
john@popconnect.org



Paul Ehrlich, our co-founder who passed away on March 13 at the age of 93, had an extraordinary impact on our living planet. His career was defined by prolific academic output and a steadfast commitment to sounding alarms about the human predicament. While he gained immense fame — and notoriety — from *The Population Bomb* (co-authored with his wife, Anne Ehrlich), his work spanned disciplines from entomology to the social foundations of prejudice. Published in 1968, *The Population Bomb* became a cultural phenomenon. Its success was bolstered by Ehrlich's frequent appearances as a provocative guest on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson.

Ehrlich never minced words regarding looming global cataclysms. While critics assert that some of his most dire predictions of massive global famine in the 1970s did not materialize, it must be noted that he was a scientist, not a soothsayer. During the years he developed the thesis for *The Population Bomb*, nations such as India were indeed on the brink of starvation. Famine was substantially averted by the Green Revolution, led by Norman Borlaug, who warned during his

1970 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, “[T]he frightening power of human reproduction must also be curbed; otherwise the success of the Green Revolution will be ephemeral only.”

In his later years, Ehrlich described a transition from a “bomb of numbers” to a “bomb of consumption.” He argued that the Green Revolution merely “defused” the immediate threat with fossil fuels and industrial chemistry, essentially trading a short-term food crisis for a long-term climate crisis. He often quipped, “We didn’t solve the population problem; we just financed it with a credit card issued by the atmosphere.”

When asked during a 2023 *60 Minutes* interview about charges that he was an alarmist, Ehrlich responded, “I was alarmed. I am still alarmed. All of my colleagues are alarmed.”

At Population Connection, we know that we must carry forward by raising the alarm on behalf of both people and the planet.

We send our condolences to Paul Ehrlich’s family, friends, and countless colleagues. [🕊️](#)



Remembering Catherine Cameron (1949–2026)

Catherine exhibited a lifelong commitment to population stabilization and reproductive health. She served on our board and held leadership roles in several other population and family planning organizations. She played a significant role in the funding and promotion of the first emergency contraceptive pill, Plan B. Equipped with a sharp sense of humor, Catherine was a great friend — smart, insightful, and dedicated to a better, safer, more equitable world for all. We will miss her.

Board Chair

Bryce Hach, MS

Board of Directors

Aaron S. Allen, PhD
 Harriet Birungi, PhD
 Aaron Dannenberg, JD, MBA
 Céline Delacroix, PhD
 Dianne Dillon-Ridgley
 Robert Engelman, MS
 Bruce Fallick, PhD
 Mark Hathaway, MD, MPH (Secretary)
 Jeff Jordan, MPA
 Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, BVetMed, MsPVM
 Seema Mohapatra, JD, MPH
 Bob Pettapiece, EdD (Treasurer)
 Dara Purvis, JD (Vice Chair)
 Heather Smith, DMgt, MBA, MSM
 Eleanor Unsworth, MS
 Mary Beth Weinberger, MA
 Kevin Whaley, PhD

President and CEO

John Seager

Editor

Marian Starkey, MSc

Population Connection (ISSN 2331-0529)

Read and share the complimentary digital version of each issue of *Population Connection* magazine at popconnect.org/magazine.

Population Connection is the national grassroots population organization that educates young people and advocates progressive action to stabilize world population at a level that can be sustained by Earth's resources.

Annual membership (\$25) includes a one-year subscription to *Population Connection* magazine, published quarterly. Population Connection is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. As such, contributions, bequests, and gifts are fully tax-deductible in accordance with current laws.

Population Connection

2120 L Street, NW, Suite 500
 Washington, DC 20037
 (202) 332-2200 • (800) 767-1956
info@popconnect.org
populationconnection.org
populationeducation.org



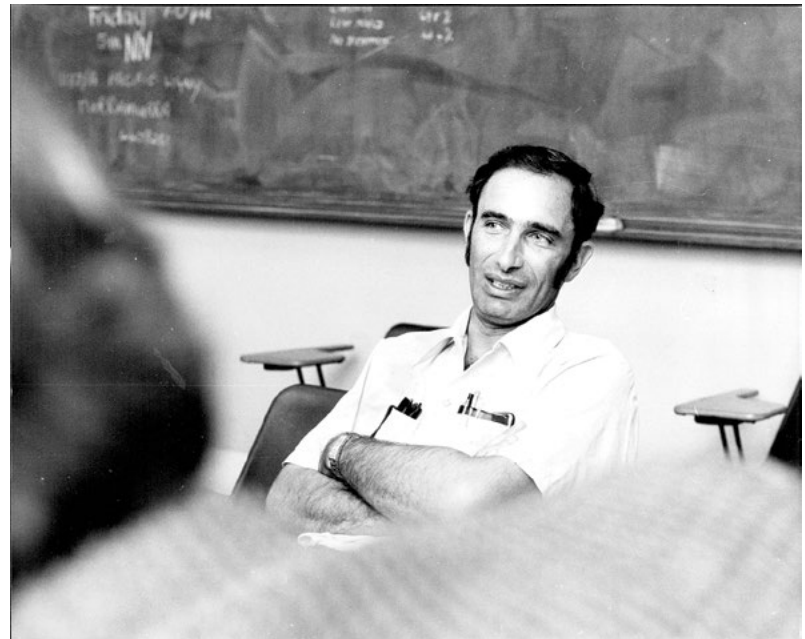
Volume 58, Issue 2
 June 2026



Feature

14

The Case for Gradual Population Decline By Adair Turner



Cover image: Paul Ehrlich at a press conference at Macquarie University in Australia on November 3, 1976. (Photo by Kevin John Berry/Fairfax Media via Getty Images)



**Follow us on
 social media!**

**Scan the QR code
 to find links to
 our Facebook,
 Instagram,
 YouTube,
 and LinkedIn
 accounts.**

Departments

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|----|----------------------------|
| 2 | Editor's Note | 26 | Global Partners: FlowReady |
| 3 | Letters to the Editor | 28 | Virtual Events |
| 5 | Editorial Excerpts | 30 | Washington View |
| 6 | Pop Facts Infographic | 32 | Field + Outreach |
| 8 | In the News | 34 | Population Education |
| 10 | Meet Our Newest Board Members | 36 | Cartoon |

Editor's Note

Marian Starkey
marian@popconnect.org




Paul Ehrlich passed away in March and was promptly disparaged by several columnists who mislabeled him “anti-human” and blamed him for coercive population control in India and other countries because of warnings about food supply that he issued as a young scientist. Few bothered to delve into his prolific and illustrious career, his outspokenness around women’s and children’s rights, or his efforts to debunk the notion of biological race and to desegregate restaurants during the civil rights movement.

I didn’t know Ehrlich, nor did anyone else on our staff. I’m not a “diehard Ehrlichian,” which is a term I hadn’t known until *The Guardian* published a derisive column about him in April. But I know from his books, articles, and interviews, and from testimonials by his admiring colleagues, that his guarded hope for humanity and the rest of the living world was intact until his final days.

Polling firm YouGov surveyed over 1,100 Americans about Paul Ehrlich soon after his death. Most (80%) selected “don’t know” when asked whether they “have a favorable or an unfavorable opinion” of Ehrlich; the rest were split evenly between having a very or somewhat favorable opinion and a very or somewhat unfavorable opinion. The breakdown was similar when respondents were asked their opinions of Thomas Malthus, who issued warnings about exponential population growth in the late 18th century, and Norman Borlaug, the “father of the Green Revolution,” which was largely responsible

for rendering Ehrlich’s famine forecasts “wrong.” It tracks that most Americans don’t have an opinion of Ehrlich since only 13% of respondents said they are familiar with *The Population Bomb* and only 3% said they had actually read the book.

Encouragingly, the YouGov survey found that Americans are more likely to say overpopulation is a problem than they are to say low birth rates are a problem. When asked, *In the US, do you think [overpopulation is / low birth rates are] ...?*, the percentage of respondents who said overpopulation is a somewhat or very serious problem was six points higher than for those who said low birth rates are a somewhat or very serious problem (47% vs 41%). When asked, *Worldwide, do you think [overpopulation is / low birth rates are] ...?*, the percentage of respondents who said overpopulation is a somewhat or very serious problem was 25 points higher than for those who said low birth rates are a somewhat or very serious problem (62% vs 37%).

The feature article in this issue, by UK economist Lord Adair Turner, expertly details why we should embrace low birth rates and continue working to slow population growth in low-income countries, where it’s weakening sustainable development efforts. Like Ehrlich, Turner emphasizes the power of population stabilization to reduce environmental pressures. And like Ehrlich, Turner believes that women having the freedom to choose smaller families is a reflection of great societal progress. We at Population Connection agree. 

Letters to the Editor

I just read the March 2026 issue of *Population Connection* and have to give a big congratulations to the staff that put this issue together. In this age of terrible reporting by the mass media, and many of us fighting depressing thoughts daily, this was one of the most hopeful, uplifting issues of any magazine I have read for months, if not years.

Phil Sickles

The Earth's resources are being depleted for lumber and cement to build more houses and highways, and land is being cleared of natural habitat to make room for more humans. Yet, religious zealots deny any human caused environmental damage is happening and believe the more babies the better.

When the Bible was written, large families were necessary for survival. There were no labor saving machines, nursing homes, or social welfare programs to care for people in old age. Fast forward to today: The world can get along well with smaller families.

I used to be a right-wing religious Republican until I gradually came to see the group's hypocrisy, inconsistency, and absolute refusal to accept evidence-based reality.

Herman Lenz

Thank you for sharing the March 2026 issue of your magazine. I found the feature on the relationship between religion, fertility, and women's rights both insightful and highly relevant to the realities faced in many settings. In pastoralist communities like those of the Maasai in Tanzania, cultural beliefs and traditional systems significantly influence family size, gender roles, and access to reproductive health services. Strengthening women's education, autonomy, and community awareness is therefore essential not only for improving livelihoods but also for advancing environmental sustainability and population resilience. Thank you for your valuable work and for keeping us informed and inspired.

Supeyo Mondo Serenyi, Programs Manager
Empowerment and Progress Organization, Tanzania

I want to thank John Seager and all the article authors for the wonderful March edition of *Population Connection* magazine and the excellent article on religion and fertility by Kirsten Stade. It's just a wonderful, wonderful magazine. It brings us up to date on all the key issues on overpopulation and all the disastrous things that are happening with the Trump administration, and what we can do. It's a source of inspiration and makes me work even harder on the issues. In this terribly difficult time when democracy is being threatened at every level, *Population Connection* is meeting the challenge in a magnificent way.

Ed Levering

Just wanted to drop you a note to say that your President's Note in the March issue was awesome. You hit so many points so well! Keep up the exceptional work!

John Pulver

Letters to the Editor, continued

I remembered Zero Population Growth from when I was a child in the '60s and the need to control population growth was a widely accepted conclusion. I was pleased to find the familiar group from my younger days is still active as Population Connection. I immediately became a supporter. As I become more familiar with the organization, I am ever more pleased with its direction.

I was especially grateful for the March issue's feature article, "Religion and Fertility: A Connection Rooted in Patriarchy." I recently published a book, *Cutting Through the Babble*, under the pen name Herbert Laffey. I wanted to introduce Population Connection to this potentially valuable resource for countering those who would utilize religion as a weapon for pronatalism, authoritarianism, or patriarchy.

Gary Martinez

Thank you for your revealing articles on how religion subjugates women and treats them merely as baby making machines. At the Roman Catholic weddings that I have attended, the priests still encourage the couples to increase and multiply. The Church seems totally oblivious to the dire problems overpopulation is causing.

George J. Saunders

As a longtime supporter of Population Connection, I thank you for bringing us so many stimulating issues of *Population Connection* magazine. I noted that the "In the News" section of the March issue highlighted a recent UN report that identifies overpopulation and overconsumption as "fundamental drivers of our planetary crises." While this may not be news to any Population Connection supporter, it is nice to see the UN acknowledge it.

Fred Leonard

If you'd prefer to read the quarterly *Population Connection* magazine online, please visit our website at popconnect.org/magazine to see archives going back to 2020. The digital version of each issue contains links to sources, staff authors' email addresses, and suggestions for further reading.



EDITORIAL EXCERPTS

The Economist

You might think that Africa would be in the midst of a crisis. The four largest donors all cut their aid spending in Africa last year, according to initial data. America slapped some of its highest tariffs on African countries. China, the continent's largest bilateral source of loans for most of the 21st century, today receives more from Africa in debt repayments than it extends in new credit. On top of all that, the war in Iran will increase the cost of fuel and fertilizer.

Yet African countries look resilient. The IMF reckons that in 2026 economic growth will be higher in Africa than in Asia, hitherto a rare occurrence. Of the 15 fastest-growing countries anywhere, 11 are expected to be on the continent.

[...]

Africa still faces huge challenges. The flipside of its demographic boom is that 15 million young people will soon be entering the labor market every year, most of them without hope of a formal job. Electricity remains patchy and costly. Agricultural productivity, while improving, lags behind global averages. The share of children in primary school has stalled since 2010. [...]

Even so, it is time for the world to update how it thinks about Africa. The Middle East is at war again, Europe is sluggish, and America is run by its own would-be autocrat. As a result, the continent is starting to seem less and less risky. Relatively speaking, Africa looks a safer bet than ever.

– March 19, 2026

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

When the Supreme Court in 2022 overturned *Roe v. Wade*, declaring there is no constitutional right to abortion, many supporters of that decision insisted that its purpose wasn't to ultimately banish reproductive rights throughout America, but merely to leave the question to the individual states.

Since then, we have seen effort after effort to quash abortion access even in states where it remains legal — and even in states where, as in Missouri, the voters have assertively demanded that it remain legal.

Sen. Josh Hawley now has escalated the conflict to restrict the rights of women across the nation, in all 50 states, no matter what their individual state laws [say] regarding reproductive rights. That would be the unavoidable outcome of his new effort to federally outlaw the safest and most commonly used method of medication abortion.

[...]

If Hawley is motivated by a genuine belief that mifepristone is inherently dangerous to women (despite the virtually unanimous conclusion of mainstream medical experts to the contrary), restoring abortion rights nationally would be one way to give them other options. Otherwise, he should at least be honest about what this is: an attempt to shut down women's control over their own bodies even in states that still protect reproductive rights.

– March 13, 2026



PAUL EHRLICH

on the

OVERSIZED HUMAN ENTERPRISE

QUOTES FROM HIS 2022 INTERVIEW
ON THE OVERSHOOT PODCAST

"But the most persistent rumor now is that the whole problem is overconsumption, not overpopulation. And this is a view held by people who believe that the area of a rectangle is caused entirely by its length – its width has nothing to do with it. Obviously, anybody who doesn't have to take off their shoes to count up to 20 knows that the amount of consumption is a product of how many people there are, plus, on average, how much each one consumes. And so, you cannot leave out the population multiplier. It is quite true that a fundamental problem, maybe the most fundamental problem, is the amount that human beings consume of the Earth's resources and how that's distributed and so on – all very essential, but of course, totally tied in with how many people there are. If we're going to redistribute resources, we need to know how many people need to get what. The population dimension cannot be ignored in any of these discussions."

"Like there's actually one man who thinks population ought to be kept growing so we can occupy the entire universe and we're going to terraform, that is make Earth like Mars so we can move there. This idiot probably doesn't even know that Mars is smaller than Earth, so it won't take care of us for long. But this is an imbecile who got a lot of money on building sports cars and thinks because he's incredibly rich that he's not an imbecile. And I don't think anybody has the nerve to tell him that."

Photo courtesy of Dr. Gerardo Ceballos, renowned Mexican ecologist and close friend of Paul Ehrlich

"When people talk about sustainability, they really ought to think about sustainability for how long. And at the moment, we are unsustainable. It is theoretically possible to get to a point where you could be sustainable for a very long time. And when people say, *Oh, you population nuts don't value people at all*, they got it exactly wrong. In other words, I would love to see a maximum number of people enjoy being *Homo sapiens*. But the way you do that is not try and have them all at once. It's stretch them out through a very long time so that everybody can have a decent standard of living. One of the things that appalls me most these days is, may have come to your attention, there are a bunch of imbeciles in the United States who are mean and are having a war against women and now want to change a woman's right to choose how many children she has. And the interesting thing about this is they don't give the slightest thought, or actually oppose, any steps, to make those children have happy, productive lives. In other words, they lose total interest in reproduction once a child is born and have no interest in children at all, although I think children are fantastic. I mean, they're funny, they're smart. Watching one grow up as I've had the opportunity of doing is one of the great pleasures of life, but of course we need to do everything we can to give those children healthy, happy lives."

"We talk about rich countries' growth. We should be talking about rich countries' shrinkage. What is needed, as every scientist who's looked at it carefully knows, is shrinkage of the size of the human enterprise. That means gradually getting fewer people and consuming less overall, which means rich countries giving up a lot of consumption so that poor countries that need it can have more consumption."

Source: Bajaj, N., Ware, A., (Hosts). Ehrlich, P. (Guest). (2022, July 5). Driving Life Over the Edge [Audio podcast episode]. In OVERSHOOT | Shrink Toward Abundance. Population Balance. populationbalance.org/podcast/paul-ehlich



IN THE NEWS

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager

Paul Ehrlich passes away at 93

Population Connection co-founder and distinguished scientist, Paul R. Ehrlich, died on March 13.

Dr. Ehrlich was the Bing Professor of Population Studies (Emeritus) at Stanford University and President of its Center for Conservation Biology, which he founded. He was a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society, and a Foreign Member of the Royal Society. He won many prestigious national and international awards over the course of his lengthy career, including the MacArthur Prize.

Despite writing and contributing to dozens of other books and more than 1,100 scientific papers, *The Population Bomb*, coauthored with his wife, Anne, came to define Ehrlich's career and his image as a controversial figure. The 1968 book's openness to considering coercive population control was certainly problematic. Surprisingly, though, this was not the primary reason that so

many posthumous media articles condemned Ehrlich. Instead, they focused on *The Population Bomb's* unfortunate scenarios of continued population growth leading to mass starvation.

Unable to foresee the magnitude of success that the Green Revolution would have in the near future, Ehrlich warned that population growth would soon outstrip available food supplies and that “hundreds of millions of people” would starve to death in the 1970s. While several million people have died of famine since the late 1960s, the death toll was nowhere near what Ehrlich predicted, because of the dramatic increase in crop productivity brought about by modern agriculture.

Fixating on the fact that Ehrlich's mass mortality scenarios did not pan out as he predicted, and because he famously lost a bet to cornucopian Julian Simon about the future cost of raw materials, media outlets concluded that Paul Ehrlich “was wrong about everything,” while neglecting that his warnings about environmental devastation, natural resource shortages

and conflicts, pandemics, and the growing risk of nuclear war were actually pretty spot-on. The media response to Ehrlich's passing largely ignored the environmental impacts of population growth, and argued that his unrealized mass starvation predictions prove that the very concept of planetary limits is wrong, with many journalists erroneously concluding that humanity can grow and innovate its way out of every crisis.

US fertility rate reaches new record low

The US general fertility rate (GFR) — the number of births per 1,000 women aged 15–44 — has reached a new low, according to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. The 2025 GFR was 53.1 births per 1,000 women, a 1% decrease from the 2024 rate (53.8). The rate has been consistently trending downward since 2007, when it was 23% higher. The total number of births in the US in 2025 was 3,606,400, also 1% lower than in 2024.

The decline is in large part driven by welcome progress towards

reducing teen births. The fertility rate for teenagers aged 15–19 dropped by 7% between 2024 and 2025, and by 72% since 2007. The new data also confirm that women are increasingly delaying childbearing, with GFR declines for women in their 20s and increases for women in their 30s and 40s.

According to the age-specific birth rates in the report, the 2025 total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.57 births per woman, a 1.6% decline from the 2024 TFR of 1.59.

Trump hijacks Title X

In April, the Trump administration announced radical changes to Title X, the federal program that helps low-income Americans access family planning services, STI testing and treatment, and cancer screenings. During his first term, Trump made it possible for anti-abortion “crisis pregnancy centers” to receive Title X funding, while all but excluding the participation of organizations that offer, discuss, or provide referrals for abortion services. After returning to office in January 2025, Trump withheld Title X funding from dozens of grantees over “possible violations” of his anti-DEI executive orders. Following a lawsuit, the administration quietly restored the money in December.

Now, Title X is essentially being turned on its head, from a program that helps people access

contraception to a vehicle for advancing Trump’s anti-rights pronatalist agenda. The new application guidance published by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) seems to entirely redefine Title X’s primary goal as boosting conceptions, soliciting applications from entities that “support family formation” and offer “infertility services” and “reproductive goals counseling.” The only reference to modern contraception in the entire document highlights its recently declining prevalence and users’ high rates of discontinuation due to side effects. What the HHS guidance doesn’t acknowledge is that the largest decline in contraceptive use in recent years has been among teens. While contraceptive use among women of all reproductive ages (15–49) has declined by 17% since 2017–2019, it has declined by 34% among girls ages 15–19, alongside reductions in sexual activity among that age group.

Trump zeroed out funding for Title X in his fiscal year 2027 budget proposal.


India embarks on new census

India, estimated by the UN to be the world’s most populous nation at over 1.46 billion, has launched an ambitious two-phase effort to count its people, to be completed in 2027.

The Indian government aims to conduct a national census every 10 years, but this one, involving

over 3 million workers as well as both in-person and digital surveys, will be the first since 2011 due to administrative issues and setbacks caused by the pandemic.

Controversially, census officials will record caste affiliation, which some argue risks deepening division and inequality, while proponents claim it will help shape fairer policies.

The resulting demographic data will inform a wide range of policies, including the distribution of government welfare programs, as well as a contentious planned redrawing of electoral constituency boundaries to reflect population change. In terms of political impact, this could mean more north-south tension due to declining parliamentary representation for southern India, where fertility rates are lowest. 

Visit our blog to read more about some of these news items: popconnect.org/blog

The digital version of this article includes hyperlinked sources: popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-june-2026

MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS

By Marian Starkey, Vice President for Communications

Over the past year, six new members have joined the Population Connection Board of Directors. Get to know them a bit on the pages that follow!

We are fortunate to have 18 experts in various fields leading Population Connection at the highest level. These accomplished professionals work in health care, academia, law, non-profit leadership, and more. They have all volunteered their time to this organization because they believe in our mission to stabilize population at a sustainable level, through improved access to voluntary family planning education and services.

We look forward to updating the group photo below with a new one at this year's annual meeting in June!



Seated, from left: Kevin Whaley, Amy Dickson (termed off), Aaron S. Allen, Eleanor Unsworth, Mary Beth Weinberger **Standing, from left:** Seema Mohapatra, Melvine Ouyo (now on staff; no longer on board), Mark Hathaway, Bruce Fallick, Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, Bryce Hach, Aaron Dannenberg, Bob Pettapiece



Harriet Birungi, PhD

Harriet was vice president of international programs at Population Council until she left the organization after more than two decades, in 2024. Based in Nairobi, Harriet provided leadership and support across Population Council's 13 international offices and its affiliated organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Prior to that position, Harriet served as country director of Population Council's Kenya office. Among her many contributions, she led the first-ever research on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents who were perinatally infected with HIV, conducted research on early and unintended pregnancy in the education sector, and served as the research director for the groundbreaking STEP UP Research Program Consortium to strengthen health systems to reduce unmet need for family planning and safe abortion services.

Harriet received her PhD in medical anthropology from the University of Copenhagen, her MA in development studies from the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, and her BA in sociology and social administration from Makerere University in her home country of Uganda.



Céline Delacroix, PhD

Céline is an adjunct professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Health Sciences. Her research specialties include climate change, environmental communication, and population health.

She is also a senior fellow at Population Institute and director of its FP/Earth program. FP/Earth analyzes the linkages between family planning, population size, and environmental sustainability and how they are perceived and how they could be harnessed to strengthen reproductive rights and improve environmental sustainability.

Céline has been the executive director of several human rights and environmental NGOs, including the Conservation Council of New Brunswick and Ethiopiaid Canada.

Céline has a PhD in population health from the University of Ottawa, an MS in environmental management from the Free University of Brussels, and a Bachelor of Laws from Cardiff University in Wales.

She is currently conducting independent research funded by Population Connection and Population Institute that will analyze the connections between population and environmental challenges.



Dianne Dillon-Ridgley

Currently the CEO of the Women’s Network for a Sustainable Future, Dianne has been a leader in sustainability and conservation for over four decades.

She has served on nearly a dozen boards, including those of the Center for International Environmental Law, the National Wildlife Federation, the World Parliament of Religions, and the River Network. Dianne returns to the Population Connection board after having previously served four times as chair.

Appointed by three US presidents, she has joined 23 US delegations at the UN and at other global meetings. For over a decade, Dianne represented World YWCA (based in Geneva) at the UN headquarters in New York, chairing the UN Millennium DPI/NGO Summit in 2000, where the Millennium Development Goals were introduced.

Dianne helped found 100Grannies, an effort to “educate, advocate, and agitate for renewable energy, pure water, clean air, and a healthy environment for future generations,” and Plains Justice, an environmental law center for the Great Plains region.



Robert Engelman, MS

Bob began his career as a newspaper reporter, working for the Associated Press, *Kansas City Times*, *Rocky Mountain News*, and Scripps Howard News Service.

In 1992, he left journalism and founded a research program on population and the environment at Population Action International (PAI), where he later became vice president for research. In 1997, he was among the founders of the Center for a New American Dream and served until 2007 as chair of its board of directors. In 2000 and again in 2002 and 2003, Bob served on the faculty of Yale University as a visiting lecturer on population and the environment. He was vice president of the Worldwatch Institute from 2007–2011 and president from 2011–2014. Since 2018, he has served as a senior fellow at Population Institute.

Bob received his BA from the University of Chicago and his MS from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, which in 1976 awarded him a Pulitzer Traveling Fellowship.

His book *Intending Eden: Parenting, Population, and the Planet*, an update of an earlier work, will be published in spring 2026.



Jeffrey Jordan, MPA

Jeff provided strategic leadership and vision for Population Reference Bureau (PRB) as president and CEO. He retired from that position in 2024, after 10 years, and after a 35-year career in international development.

Prior to PRB, Jeff was the senior vice president for international programs at the Catholic Medical Mission Board, where he provided oversight of all international programs in HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, neglected and tropical diseases, and gender.

His demographic career began at Population Resource Center and continued at Futures Group/Constella Futures. At Futures, he first served as an analyst and program manager in population, family planning/reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS, before becoming vice president of program development and COO.

He served for nearly a decade as the co-chair of the USAID Interagency Gender Working Group.

Jeff received his MPA from Princeton University and his BA in economics from Davidson College.



Dara Purvis, JD

Dara is a scholar of family law, sexual orientation and gender identity, feminist legal theory, and masculinities. Her recent work focuses on the constitutional rights of transgender children. She has been published in several prominent law reviews and in *The New York Times*.

Prior to her current position as a professor at the Temple University Beasley School of Law, Dara was a professor at Penn State Law and a visiting assistant professor at the University of Illinois College of Law. She clerked for The Hon. Gerard E. Lynch, US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and The Hon. Raymond C. Fisher, US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Dara has a JD from Yale Law School, where she served as the editor-in-chief of the *Yale Law Journal*. She has an MPhil from Cambridge University and a BA from the University of Southern California.

Dara has previously served on the Population Connection board and is now its vice chair. She also currently sits on the board of Population Connection Action Fund. She first became involved with Population Connection as a part-time membership assistant in the summer of 2004, before beginning law school.

THE CASE FOR GRADUAL POPULATION DECLINE

By Adair Turner
Originally published
by Project Syndicate
on October 3, 2025

Contrary to conventional wisdom, rapid population growth rarely delivers demographic dividends, while low fertility rates do not necessarily lead to stagnation. In fact, persistently high fertility often exacerbates underemployment, limits investment in education and infrastructure, and entrenches poverty across generations.

While we should always be wary of proposing a universal law of human nature, the past half-century has revealed a consistent and enduring pattern. In every society that combines economic prosperity, a well-educated female population, and access to safe and affordable contraception, fertility rates fall below — often well below — the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman.

Sweden's fertility rate dropped below 2.1 as early as 1968. By 1975, most European countries, along with the United States and Canada, had followed suit. None has risen above 2.1 since then.

As women's education and access to contraception expanded, low fertility became increasingly common. India's fertility rate now stands at 1.9; that of Latin America and the Caribbean fell below replacement level in 2015 and now stands at 1.8; Vietnam, Malaysia, and Turkey have rates of 1.9, 1.5, and 1.6, respectively.

Moreover, the greatest demographic challenge of our time is not falling fertility in successful countries. Instead, that distinction belongs to explosive population growth in many of the world's poorest economies, particularly across Africa.

A similar pattern appears within countries. In India, the fertility rates of the three most economically developed states — Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka — range from 1.7 to 1.9, whereas rates in the poorer states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are 2.4 and 3.0, respectively.

Over the past 50 years, the world's fastest-growing economies — South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Singapore — have recorded the lowest fertility rates, ranging between 0.8 and 1.2 children per woman. By contrast, the highest fertility rates are found where poverty

remains entrenched or women's rights are severely restricted, such as sub-Saharan Africa (4.2) and Afghanistan (4.7).

Yet instead of being welcomed as the natural outcome of economic progress and women's freedom to choose, declining fertility is often framed as a looming crisis. In India,

commentators warn of the “end of the demographic dividend,” while low fertility rates in Europe (1.4) and North America (1.6) are routinely portrayed as evidence of “stagnant” societies suffering from demographic “exhaustion.”

In 2018, the Robert Schuman Foundation warned that Europe risks “demographic suicide.” In the US, billionaire Elon Musk has predicted “catastrophic population collapse,” and Vice President JD Vance says he wants “more babies in the United States of America.”

But this conventional wisdom is deeply misguided. While East Asia’s exceptionally low fertility rates will indeed create serious challenges if sustained indefinitely, fertility rates in the 1.5–2 range are likely more conducive to human welfare than those above the replacement threshold of 2.1.

Moreover, the greatest demographic challenge of our time is not falling fertility in successful countries. Instead, that distinction belongs to explosive population growth in many of the world’s poorest economies, particularly across Africa.

Too few workers?

Warnings about falling fertility often focus on the old-age dependency ratio — the number of retirees relative to the economically active population.

In countries where fertility decline started earliest, the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) estimates that the ratio of people over 65 to working-age individuals (aged 15–64) will rise from around one-quarter today to one-half by 2050. There

are two major problems with this widely used measure. First, it assumes that retirement ages remain fixed despite rising life expectancy, thereby conflating two distinct demographic trends: falling fertility and increasing

Politicians calling for “more babies” should recognize that if birth rates do increase, the total dependency ratio will rise even faster than before until those children enter the workforce two decades later.

longevity. As the United Kingdom’s Pensions Commission (which I chaired from 2003 to 2006) showed, a significant share of the apparent rise in dependency — about half in Britain’s case — disappears if retirement ages are gradually

raised so that the proportions of adult life spent working and in retirement remain roughly stable. Second, the standard measure ignores the fact that children are also dependents, which means lower fertility reduces child



Garden Grove Unified School District Superintendent Gabriela Mafi talks with a first-grade class at Rosita Elementary School in Santa Ana, California, on February 12, 2026. (Photo by Paul Bersebach/MediaNews Group/Orange County Register via Getty Images)

At just 0.8, South Korea’s fertility rate may eventually sap its innovative vitality. But the idea that low fertility rates inevitably result in technological and cultural stagnation is supported by neither logic nor empirical evidence.

dependency even as old-age dependency rises. Politicians calling for “more babies” should recognize that if birth rates do increase, the total dependency ratio will rise even faster than before until those children enter the workforce two decades later.

But, in principle, the dependency ratio argument is valid: lower fertility means a one-off increase in the number of retirees relative to workers. The crucial question is whether productivity growth can make up the difference. So far it always has.

In 1800, old-age dependency ratios were close to zero, because most people worked from childhood until death. In today’s advanced economies, there are about 0.4 retirees for every worker, each of whom enters the labor force far later in life and works far fewer hours each year than their counterparts in the early 19th century. The share of hours lived after the age of 15 which are spent working has fallen at least 60%; but advanced-economy GDP

per capita has increased 15-fold.

This reflects humanity’s extraordinary capacity to raise productivity. In pre-industrial societies, most people worked in agriculture,

laboring more than 60 hours per week simply to produce enough food to survive. In developed economies today, fewer than 3% of working-age adults — working far fewer hours — produce enough food to feed not only themselves but also retirees, children, and teenagers, who no longer need to work.

The same is true of manufacturing, which currently

accounts for less than 20% of the workforce in developed economies. China’s 125 million factory workers produce 30% of all the manufactured goods used by the world’s 8.2 billion people; and robot-based automation will reduce that number quickly even as output continues to rise. While the technological advances of the past 50 years have given us mobile devices with far more computing power than NASA used to land a man on the moon, producing all the world’s smartphones, laptops, and tablets employs only 10–15 million people out of a global working-age population of 5 billion.

So, rising dependency ratios are not a problem unless humanity has suddenly lost its ability to



A humanoid robot at the World IT Show in Seoul, South Korea, on April 22, 2026. (Photo by SeongJoon Cho/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

sustain productivity growth. In fact, AI is likely to strengthen it.

The AI acceleration

At first glance, AI may appear just another tool for automating an ever-wider range of tasks, but its self-learning capacity makes it more than that — not just a technology which can increase productivity, but one which can itself accelerate technological advance. This transformative potential underpins optimistic projections of AI's economic impact, with true believers predicting that it could automate almost all jobs, boosting annual growth to 20–30%, compared with the 20th century average of 2.8%.

There are good reasons to take such extreme predictions with a very large grain of salt, especially those suggesting that rapid gains in underlying productivity will be reflected in measured GDP. But we are clearly moving toward a future in which machines can perform most human jobs. By 2100, all the world's food could be produced by less than 1% of the global population, and manufacturing, transport, and logistics could require a similarly small fraction of the workforce. Many people may remain employed in these sectors, but only because high fertility rates in poorer countries continue to generate surplus labor willing to work at very low wages, not because it is technologically necessary.

When it comes to desk jobs, humanity has shown an almost limitless capacity for inventing tasks devoted to zero-sum competition, especially in areas like marketing, sales, lobbying, and finance. But AI is still poised to automate a significant

portion of the roughly one-third of jobs that involve repetitive tasks like information gathering and processing.

Tasks that require hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, and flexibility will be far harder to automate. Robots are still pretty inept at something as simple as loading a dishwasher; plumbers and electricians are unlikely to be replaced any time soon. But even here, the question is almost certainly when, not if.

Bank of America estimates that by 2060, there could be 2 billion humanoid robots working in

people's homes, alongside another billion in the service sector. If that forecast is even remotely accurate, and if these machines are even moderately capable, there will be no shortage of workers.

There are also jobs we should not automate, even if we could. In the US, about 14.5% of employees work in health care and social assistance. But even in this sector, only a minority of hours worked involve emotionally important face-to-face interaction.

In 2017, MGI estimated

that 36% of hours worked in this sector could be automated with already existing technologies. As that percentage rises over time, and as work is automated across all other sectors, finding enough workers will hardly be a major challenge.

For many people, a world of near-limitless automation raises another concern: Will there be enough jobs for everyone to earn a good living? Whatever the answer, it is absurd to worry about a shortage of jobs while simultaneously fearing that low fertility will leave us with too few workers.

For many people, a world of near-limitless automation raises another concern: Will there be enough jobs for everyone to earn a good living? Whatever the answer, it is absurd to worry about a shortage of jobs while simultaneously fearing that low fertility will leave us with too few workers.

Too few innovators?

While machines can perform many tasks, what about innovation and creativity? In a world of low fertility and population decline, “there are fewer young people around to think, create, and invent,” argues Paul Morland in his 2024 book, *No One Left: Why the World Needs More Children*. Fewer births, the argument goes, means fewer discoveries.

But the notion that “old people” cannot innovate is ludicrous. Whatever one thinks of his politics, Musk at 54 shows no signs of declining ability to drive technological and business innovation. Beethoven wrote some of the most strikingly original works in music history when he was in his fifties, and Picasso was as inventive in his sixties and seventies as he was in his twenties.

Still, on average, a higher share of younger people may contribute to innovation, especially in technical fields where mathematical reasoning plays a central role. But only a fraction of the population, whether young or old, has ever been responsible for major technological advances.

Consider nuclear science. In 1890, humanity had almost no understanding of nuclear physics; by 1945, its knowledge was deep enough to build atomic bombs and generate nuclear power. Yet the scientists and technologists behind these breakthroughs numbered only in the thousands and were concentrated mainly in Europe and the US at a time when these regions’ youth population was less than a tenth of today’s global total.

Sustained increases in per capita income depend on rising capital per worker – physical (infrastructure and equipment) and human (education and workforce skills). Rapid population growth undermines both, limiting investment in education, reducing per capita physical infrastructure, and making it impossible to create jobs quickly enough to absorb new workers.

And that was before the development of AI, itself developed by a tiny fraction of the global workforce. DeepMind’s AlphaFold has mapped the structure of nearly all known proteins, hugely improving the ability of very small numbers of research scientists to develop new drugs.

The same applies to entertainment, fashion, and the culinary arts, where new ideas are driven by a small

minority of creative people, many of whom make their most important contributions well past youth. And if we really did need more innovators, having smaller families later in life might free up youthful energy otherwise devoted to childcare.

South Korea is a case in point. Its fertility rate fell below 1.7 in 1985, and the share of its population aged 20–40 has declined by 20% since 2000, yet the country still ranked first in Bloomberg’s 2021 Innovation Index. Earlier this year, it ranked 12th in the Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index 2025, a “meteoric ascent” attributed to its “dominance in arts and entertainment” and the worldwide appeal of its cultural exports, whether K-pop, K-dramas like *Squid Game*, or K-beauty products. At just 0.8, South Korea’s fertility rate may eventually sap its innovative vitality. But the idea that low fertility rates inevitably result in technological and cultural stagnation is supported by neither logic nor empirical evidence.

Demographic dividends and delusions

Conventional wisdom holds that low fertility leads to stagnation, while rapid population



Roadside market in Abuja, Nigeria, on December 8, 2025. (Photo by Etinosa Yvonne/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

growth delivers dynamism. The International Monetary Fund, noting that Africa will account for 80% of global population growth through 2100, describes this as “a window of opportunity, which if properly harnessed, can translate into higher growth and yield a demographic dividend.” India’s national investment promotion agency, Invest India, similarly highlights its youthful population as a key selling point for global investors.

But there is no evidence that economies with sustained high fertility rates grow faster. On the contrary, persistently high fertility often leads to a demographic disaster of sluggish

income growth and widespread underemployment.

Sustained increases in per capita income depend on rising capital per worker — physical (infrastructure and equipment) and human (education and workforce skills). Rapid population growth undermines both, limiting investment in education, reducing per capita physical infrastructure, and making it impossible to create jobs quickly enough to absorb new workers.

India offers a striking example. Since 1990, per capita income has grown by an average of 4.3% annually, with a high savings rate offsetting capital dilution. But per capita growth would have

Between 1990 and 2020, GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa grew by 0.9% per year — a pace so slow that extreme poverty could persist for centuries. The region’s working-age population has risen from 206 million in 1990 to 580 million today. Rather than producing a demographic dividend, this population boom has fueled an underemployment crisis.

been faster if population growth had been slower. Over the past three decades, the working-age population has swelled from 700 million to 1 billion, but only 490 million count as part of the workforce. Of these workers, just 113 million earn a regular wage outside agriculture, and barely

Looking ahead, sub-Saharan Africa's working-age population is projected to rise to 1.1 billion by 2050 and 1.9 billion by 2100. But in a world where most jobs can be automated, there is no chance that such vast numbers will be absorbed into high-productivity work. Africa will reap a true demographic dividend only when its fertility rates fall below replacement level.

60 million are employed in the “organized sector,” where large companies deploy cutting-edge technologies to boost output while reducing labor demand.

In effect, India's economy is a rapidly growing island of high productivity surrounded by a vast ocean of low-income underemployment, with much of the working-age population excluded from the country's

growth story. Had fertility fallen sooner, India today would have a higher employment rate and per capita income. The good news is that with fertility now below replacement level, the working-age population will stabilize within the next 20–30 years.

By contrast, Africa's demographic trajectory is clearly unsustainable. Between 1990 and 2020, GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa grew by 0.9% per year — a pace so slow that extreme poverty could persist for centuries.

The region's working-age population has risen from 206 million in 1990 to 580 million today. Rather than producing a demographic dividend, this population boom has fueled an underemployment crisis. The International Labor Organization estimates that 93% of Nigeria's working-age population is either unemployed or stuck in the informal economy. Even in South Africa — the region's most advanced economy — 35% of workers remain outside formal employment.

Looking ahead, sub-Saharan Africa's working-age population is projected to rise to 1.1 billion by 2050 and 1.9 billion by 2100. But in a world where most jobs can be automated, there is no chance that such vast numbers will be absorbed into high-productivity work. Africa will reap a true demographic dividend only when its fertility rates fall below replacement level.

How population growth fuels cost-of-living increases

For developed countries, too, the conventional wisdom is that rising populations drive growth and that immigration is critical to countering the effects of low fertility. But this overlooks the significant benefits of gradual population decline.

In the UK, the fertility rate varied between 1.7 and 1.9 for four decades after the mid-1970s. Until the 1990s, net migration was close to zero. Had that pattern continued, the population would have stabilized at around 60 million, followed by a gradual decline.

Instead, net immigration increased to around 100,000 annually in the late 1990s and 200,000 between 2004 and 2019. Over the last five years, it has surged to roughly 600,000 per year, pushing the population to 69 million. But the UK has not experienced a demographic dividend: GDP per capita has averaged just 0.4% annual growth since 2005, compared with 2.3% in the previous half-century. While the slowdown has multiple causes, the benefits of immigration as a remedy for low fertility remain unproven. Supposedly “demographically stagnant” Japan, with a population now 4 million smaller than in 2000, has grown faster, with GDP per capita rising by 0.6% annually.

Conversely, rising populations have fueled cost-of-living pressures and widened inequality, most notably by raising housing costs. Over the past 20 years, many countries have experienced sluggish real income growth and a much-discussed “cost-of-living crisis.” But not all costs have increased: clothing has become cheaper relative to income, and the prices of most electronic appliances, mobile communications, and online entertainment have fallen dramatically. By contrast, rents and home prices have climbed far faster than average earnings in most developed — and many developing — countries.

This is partly the result of economic prosperity. As automation lowers the cost of many goods and services, households devote a larger share of their income to competing for scarce resources like housing and land. That dynamic would persist to some extent even if populations declined,

because what matters most is not the total housing supply but homes in specific, desirable locations. But population growth intensifies the pressure.

Many recent studies assess the link between immigration and housing prices, but immigration and higher birth rates produce the same effect over the long term. Research by Bank of Canada economists found that immigration inflows equal to 1% of a US county’s population were associated with a 3.8% increase in house prices and a 2.2% rise in rents, but that native-born population growth had roughly twice the impact.

Why population decline could reduce inequality

Thomas Piketty’s 2013 book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, showed that wealth-to-income (W/Y) ratios have increased sharply across

most of the world’s developed economies over the past 70 years. Because wealth is distributed far more unequally than income, and because it is inherited, this trend undermines social mobility. Without higher taxes on wealth or inheritance, he argues, W/Y ratios will continue to rise.

Piketty may well be right, but for the wrong reason. His analysis assumes that the annual increase in total wealth equals the savings rate multiplied by total income. In other words, wealth comes from household savings, which implies that the W/Y ratio depends on the savings rate relative to the economy’s growth rate. By reducing GDP

growth, then, declining fertility would boost the W/Y ratio.

But Piketty’s own data show that most of the increase in the W/Y ratio is the result of housing prices rising faster than average earnings, driven by competition for limited supply in desirable locations. This implies

that, contrary to Piketty’s prediction, population decline would actually slow the rise in W/Y ratios. And a slower or falling W/Y ratio would benefit those without access to inheritance or the “bank of mom and dad” as a path to homeownership.

Population decline will also reduce income inequality, benefiting lower-income groups. As Geoffrey Hinton, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist often called the godfather of AI, has warned, “AI will make a few people much richer and most people poorer.” Recent studies support this view: if AI fuels rapid productivity growth, the gains will flow mainly to capital owners and a small pool of highly skilled developers, while lower-skilled workers’ wages will fall.

In a world of near-total automation, it is easy to imagine a small wealthy elite employing armies of

Population stabilization and eventual decline would also make it easier to confront the greatest environmental challenge of all: climate change.

low-paid workers to tend gardens, cater parties, provide personal care, and walk their dogs at wages so low that replacing them with machines would not be worthwhile. But wages in such a world will still reflect the balance between labor and capital: the larger the workforce relative to capital, the lower wages will sink. Conversely, if low fertility leads to a gradual population decline, wages for lower-income workers are likely to be at least somewhat higher.

Historically, slow population growth — or outright decline — has tended to benefit workers and disadvantage capital owners. In his 2017 book, *The Great Leveler*, the Stanford University economic historian Walter Scheidel notes that the collapse in Europe's population after the Black Death of 1348 drove up real wages and cut landowners' rents. A 2020 study suggests that these wage increases also spurred innovation, putting northwest Europe on a path to sustained improvements in living standards.

Scarcity, not abundance, is often the mother of invention. Fortunately, similar benefits can now be achieved through freely chosen low fertility rather than a catastrophic plague.

Smaller population, healthier planet

A shrinking population would also enhance welfare by reducing the burden on natural systems. As people grow wealthier, many place greater value on scarce resources such as urban green spaces, protected habitats and wildlife, clean rivers, and uncrowded beaches — all of which are diminished by population growth and could be preserved, even expanded, with gradual decline.

Population stabilization and eventual decline would also make it easier to confront the greatest environmental challenge of all: climate change. With global temperatures rising at an alarming rate, the top priority is to reduce emissions per capita while improving energy access and ensuring prosperity by deploying the clean technologies



Paddling rented rowboats in New York City's Central Park on September 27, 2025. (Photo by Muhammed Selim Korkutata/Anadolu via Getty Images)

now available. But the larger the population, the harder the task becomes. Since 2000, China's emissions have nearly tripled as its GDP per capita quintupled and its population grew by 12%, before leveling off after 2022. Had China's population grown as fast as India's, which surged by 38% over the same period, its emissions would be even higher.

Meanwhile, sub-Saharan Africa emits less than one ton of carbon dioxide per capita — a reflection of its severely constrained energy use and low incomes. Expanding zero-carbon electricity is both possible, thanks to the plunging costs of solar photovoltaic (PV) and batteries, and urgent. But achieving this transition will require massive investment, and given the region's limited domestic savings, external financing is essential. The larger the future population, the greater the financing needs will be, and the less likely they are to be met.



In some countries, high population density will also increase the cost of the energy transition. Globally, devoting just 1% of land to solar PV could generate double today's global electricity supply. China, with 150 people per square kilometer (388 per square mile), has plentiful land to support a zero-emission economy. But in Bangladesh, where density is around 1,300 people per square kilometer, supplying as much electricity per capita as Europe consumes would require devoting 6–10% of the land to solar PV, potentially undercutting food production or forcing the government to rely on more expensive alternatives like nuclear power.

The sooner densely populated countries achieve population stability, the easier it will be to build the net-zero economies needed to contain global warming.

Any serious assessment of fertility decline must therefore weigh costs against potential benefits,

rather than reflexively assuming that any rate below 2.1 is inherently bad. Of course, fertility can fall too far. If South Korea were to maintain its current rate of 0.8 indefinitely, the retiree-to-worker ratio would eventually rise from 0.3 to around 1.5 — a burden that even major technological advances might not offset.

But there is no reason why the optimal fertility rate for human welfare could not lie somewhere between 1.6 and 1.9 rather than 2.1 or higher. A global fertility rate of around 1.75, if sustained, would imply a population decline of roughly 30% over the next century — enough to mitigate the inequality that AI will almost certainly intensify, while also reducing environmental pressures without stifling innovation.

But that fortunate outcome won't happen anytime soon. The United Nations median projection is that the global population will climb from 8.2 billion today to 10.2 billion by 2100, with 147% growth in Africa offsetting a 5% decline in the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

The freedom to choose

In a free society, fertility should not be determined by politicians or economists, but by individuals, particularly women. The key question, then, is what people themselves want, not what experts think the optimal rate might be. A recent UN report argues that the “real” fertility crisis lies in the gap between aspirations and reality: 11% of women expect to have fewer children than their “ideal,” while 7% expect to have more. The median “ideal” is two children.

But as *Financial Times* columnist Janan Ganesh points out, survey responses about “ideal” family size often reveal little about how people make decisions. In reality, families weigh the desire for children against the pull of consumption and leisure. The revealed preferences of the past half-century, therefore, tell us more than opinion polls: in every advanced economy where people are free to choose, fertility rates settle well below 2.0. But



Relaxing on Long Beach, a remote, secluded destination on the southeastern tip of Koh Chang Island in Thailand. (Photo by Nathalie Jamois/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images)

how far below does matter to the balance of benefits and costs. Policymakers would therefore be wise to address

the factors which drive fertility to very low levels.

According to the UN survey, beyond limited income and job prospects, the main barriers would-be parents face are the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare and soaring housing costs. Addressing the latter challenge effectively may, however, involve difficult trade-offs: if new construction comes at the expense of green spaces and sports fields, raising children may appear less attractive. Immigration to offset low fertility may therefore drive fertility rates lower.

In a free society, fertility should not be determined by politicians or economists, but by individuals, particularly women.

Even with effective policies, fertility rates are unlikely to rise above the 1.5–1.9 range observed in many developed countries over the past 50 years,

including those with excellent childcare systems and abundant land for housing. Rather than being feared, this outcome should be celebrated as the hallmark of a prosperous society where people are free to decide how to live their lives. [🌐](#)

Adair Turner, Chair of the Energy Transitions Commission, was Chair of the UK Financial Services Authority from 2008 to 2012. He is the author of many books, including *Between Debt and the Devil: Money, Credit, and Fixing Global Finance* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

Give through your IRA tax-free.



We are honored to include Julian and Kathy Donahue in our ZPG Society. In addition to having included Population Connection as a beneficiary of their trust, the Donahues have given through their IRA by making a qualified charitable distribution to Population Connection.

*Kathy and Julian Donahue
ZPG Society Members*



If you're age 70½ or older, you can make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) directly from your IRA to Population Connection, up to \$111,000 per person in 2026.

A QCD is a smart, tax-efficient way to give because it may:

- Reduce your taxable income
- Help satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD)
- Support global population stabilization right now

You can also name Population Connection as a beneficiary of your IRA to create a lasting legacy. Making a gift through your IRA is simple. Contact us or your IRA administrator to find out how.

Make your IRA gift today!



To learn more, visit popconnect.org/legacy, email legacy@popconnect.org, or call **202-974-7756**.



GLOBAL PARTNERS

FlowReady

By Florence Blondel, Digital Media Manager at Population Connection

Every year, millions of girls encounter their first period without knowing what to expect. Due to pervasive cultural stigmas and taboos around menstruation, this moment often comes with shame, fear, and silence. Even worse, it is sometimes perceived as a signal that girls are ready for marriage and childbearing.

I founded FlowReady in 2020 in my home country of Uganda to change this story and ensure every girl understands her body, feels empowered to ask questions, and is supported throughout her journey into adolescence.

As the Founder and CEO of FlowReady, I lead my small organization's efforts to combat period poverty¹ in Uganda.

With a primary focus on girls who have yet to experience their first period, FlowReady seeks to combat misinformation and harmful cultural norms and provide hygiene products, related supplies, and education. Each girl in our program receives washable cloth pads, underwear, toilet paper, soap, and the *FlowReady Period Guide* to help them

¹ Defined by the UN as "the inability to afford and access menstrual products, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and education and awareness to manage menstrual health"

manage menstruation with dignity. In some households with multiple menstruating daughters, girls are forced to share pads or use soil, mud, or banana fibers. FlowReady makes sure they have enough products so that each girl can have her own personal supply. Extra pads and other supplies are stocked at schools of operation where girls can access them when needed.

FlowReady also works to dismantle the dangerous association between menarche (the onset of menstruation) and girls' perceived readiness for marriage and childbearing. In Uganda, 40% of women who are currently 20–49 years old were married before they turned 18; 11% were married

before the age of 15. One-fifth of 17-year-olds have already had a baby or are pregnant for the first time.

"I used to miss four days of school every month. Now it's only one — and sometimes none."

FlowReady combines menstrual hygiene management with comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education. The organization addresses the needs of young girls holistically, offering essential products and empowering

“Cases of absenteeism have reduced and girls are not shying away and even the boys are helping them. I experienced a scenario in my class when a boy came to the help of a girl with a sweater. Additionally, girls are staying in school without fear. They are now promoting their personal hygiene. We also set up a safe room for them.”

knowledge. This ensures that girls are equipped to manage their periods confidently and helps them make informed decisions about their bodies and futures.

Ongoing conversations with people in the communities



where FlowReady works remind me how deeply menstrual stigma is woven into everyday life in Uganda and how essential trust in the messenger is to changing harmful norms. For that reason, all of the program’s team members are from the communities we serve.

In 2025, FlowReady distributed 250 menstrual kits; reached 96 primary school girls through menstrual health education sessions; engaged 30 boys in conversations about menstrual health and respect; and held feedback sessions with 45 girls to ensure their voices are guiding the organization’s work. Volunteers also made six home visits to engage families directly in order to help create more supportive environments where girls can manage their periods with confidence and without fear or shame.



Above, top: Girls at Makembo Primary School in Mayuge district show off their new menstrual kits. **Above, bottom:** Boys at Makembo Primary School read the *FlowReady Period Guide*. (Photos courtesy of FlowReady)

At FlowReady, we believe periods should never be a reason for girls to miss school, feel ashamed, or face early marriage and childbearing. We are proud to work toward a future where menstruation is seen as a normal, healthy part of life. 🌍

Learn more at flowready.org and follow @flowreadynow on Instagram and @flowready on Bluesky.

VIRTUAL EVENTS

Spring Events to Honor Women and Earth

By Natalie Widel, Director of Digital Marketing

March

We celebrated International Women’s Day by hosting a webinar with Women for Conservation (W4C), our Colombian Global Partner. Founded in 2019, W4C works with communities in biodiversity hotspots to empower women as environmental leaders and stewards of sustainable livelihoods. Since 2020, the organization has conducted

68 workshops and reached close to 3,000 participants — mostly women and children — through training in nature guiding, conservation, sustainable crafts, children’s environmental education, and reproductive health.

Population Connection Senior Analyst Hannah Evans hosted the webinar and shared photos and stories from her visit (with Digital Media Manager Florence Blondel) to W4C

in November 2025. Mother-daughter duo Sara Inés Lara, Founder and President of W4C, and Isabella Cortés Lara, Executive Director of W4C, also gave an overview of some of the organization’s programs and their importance to their local communities.

April

We celebrated “Earth Month” with a slew of activities supported by members and supporters like YOU!



Members tabled at Earth Day events in New York City, Pensacola, Florida, and Galena, Illinois — reaching hundreds of people in their local communities with materials and information making the links between population growth, climate change, resource depletion, and other environmental challenges.

Over 200 people joined us for two virtual events:

- an official side event to the 59th session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development (CPD59)¹, featuring author, retired journalist, and new Population Connection board member Robert Engelman
- a presentation by Population Connection President and CEO John Seager about the still-relevant themes in our 2016 book, *The Good Crisis: How Population Stabilization Can Foster a Healthy US Economy*

May

Every other month, Population Connection members and supporters meet via Zoom

¹ Florence Blondel attended CPD59 in person from April 13–17. She expertly delivered two oral statements, one in collaboration with Population Institute, and spoke with many influential demographers and population professionals. Find recordings of her statements, along with our presubmitted written statement, at popconnect.org/united-nations.




Kathy Schwarz and Middy Streeter hosting a table at the Earth Day festival in New York City's Union Square on April 19, 2026

to discuss a book or long-form publication and how the ideas presented relate to population issues. During our May meeting, we discussed *Becoming Earth: A Journey Through the Hidden Wonders That Bring Our Planet to Life* by Ferris Jabr.

In this book, Jabr introduces readers to a diverse cast of fascinating people who have devoted themselves to the work of understanding the planet's wondrous ecology and self-stabilizing processes. Through evocative narrative, he shows us how Earth became the planet we know and love, and how human activity is rapidly changing it. He challenges us to see how we can all help determine what kind of Earth we will leave our descendants to inherit.

June

Our popular Summer Photo Contest is now in its fifth year, and YOU are invited to submit an entry! Winning photos will be published in the September issue of this magazine, featured on our website throughout the year, and used in other Population Connection digital and print publications. Learn more and enter the contest at popconnect.org/photo-contest-2026. The deadline for entries is World Population Day — July 11!

If you haven't attended our virtual events, we hope you'll be inspired to join us in the future. You can find recaps of the events featured here as well as see what we have in store for the coming months at popconnect.org/virtual-events. 

Trump Expands the Global Gag Rule and Contracts the Family Planning Budget

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs

Vastly expanded Global Gag Rule takes effect

On January 27, the Trump-Vance administration published three new rules in the Federal Register to expand the odious Global Gag Rule to include more funding, more entities, and more activities.

Collectively named (presumably as an homage to George Orwell) the Promoting Human Flourishing in Foreign Assistance policy, the rules apply to all non-military foreign assistance. One of the provisions expands the entities covered by the existing Global Gag Rule. The second rule prohibits recipient countries, private organizations, and multilateral agencies from providing “sex rejecting procedures” or “promoting radical gender ideology.” And the third requires recipients to agree to not “promote discriminatory equity ideology” or “engage in unlawful DEI-related

discrimination.” The rules also allow for, but don’t promise, waivers from these requirements in certain, unexplained circumstances.

The new policies took effect on February 26. Unsurprisingly, they have created chaos and confusion. The State Department has been unable to explain how the rules are implemented or how the waiver process works. At a hearing on April 15, the US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN agencies that receive voluntary contributions from the US are subject to the new rules) responded to a question from Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) on how these rules are being implemented, saying only that the administration was “engaging on implementation.”

What does seem clear is that the policy is designed to weaponize US foreign assistance in support of the administration’s ongoing promotion of rigid and

outdated gender roles and its creepy obsession with forcing women to have more children.

Democrats in both houses introduced legislation to block the implementation of the expanded policy on April 29. The Protecting Human Rights and Public Health in Foreign Assistance Act was introduced by Sens. Shaheen and Rosen in the Senate (S.4436) and by Reps. Meng, Frankel, DeGette, Jayapal, Jacobs, and Meeks in the House (H.R.8582).

White House budget continues assault on family planning and contraceptives

The White House sent its 2027 budget proposal to Congress on April 3, more than a month late (presidents’ budgets are due the first Monday in February for the following fiscal year). As the adage goes, budgets are more about values than dollars. This budget is disturbing on both counts.

It eliminates all investment in international family planning and reproductive health programs, dismissing it as harmful and wasteful. It excludes support for Gavi, the global program to provide vaccines, and rejects efforts to combat climate change and shift toward green energy. It promises that the United States will not support “unfettered access to birth control.” Examples given of global health programs being eliminated include efforts “promoting reproductive health education and access to birth control and other harmful programs couched under ‘family planning’ in Ghana” and “promoting health equity and providing condoms and contraception in Kenya.”

In its Congressional Budget Justification document, the Department of State lauded the budget’s elimination of “global health activities that do not make America safer, such as family planning and reproductive health.”


It doesn’t get any better on the domestic side. The budget eliminates funding in place since 2024 for the development and evaluation of an online tool called ContraceptionForAll, which researchers at Arizona State University are creating to help trans and gender-

nonconforming people choose a contraceptive method best suited to their individual needs. It defunds the Teen Pregnancy Prevention program, specifically dismissing as wasteful activities designed to promote sexual health and equity among young people experiencing poverty. This shouldn’t be a surprise after a number of MAGA figures bemoaned the latest data showing that the teen birth rate in the United States has fallen by more than 80% since the recent peak in 1991. Katie Miller, wife of senior White House aide Stephen Miller, said that this was “killing population growth” and that girls’ “biological destiny is to have babies.”

And once again, the president proposes the elimination of Title X, the domestic family planning program. At the same time, recent guidance sent by the Department of Health and Human Services makes clear that, should Congress disagree and again appropriate funding, the administration wants to shift the focus of the program.

Title X was created under the Nixon administration to help lower-income Americans get affordable contraceptives and family planning care. It has been remarkably successful despite being

woefully underfunded for decades. The Trump-Vance administration is now seeking to shift the mission to one of promoting childbearing. They are suggesting downplaying modern, safe, and effective contraceptives and to instead focus on “fertility education” and unproven “restorative” fertility medications. In effect, they’re proposing turning the program upside-down. They’re taking a proven and much-needed family planning program and morphing it into a pro-natalist propaganda outfit.

It’s extremely unlikely that Congress will approve this presidential budget as-is. House Republicans have begun their work on FY 2027 appropriations bills. The first draft of their State Department funding bill provides funding for international family planning, albeit significantly reduced from the level appropriated for 2026. But it also includes a provision to write the Trump-Vance expanded Global Gag Rule into law. Democrats in both houses are likely to offer amendments in the Appropriations Committee to strike this provision. And such a provision is unlikely to be approved by the Senate, even if it does make it through the narrowly divided House. 

FIELD + OUTREACH

Meet the Organizers: Expanding the #Fight4HER in New Hampshire and North Carolina

By Lauren Salmieri, National Field Director

Richeline Cadet and Kim Ip were born more than 1,500 miles apart — in Haiti and Vermont, respectively — but their paths have led them to the same place: organizing with #Fight4HER to defend global reproductive rights.

Richeline Cadet North Carolina

Growing up in Haiti, Richeline saw how patriarchal societies favor boys over girls.

“Girls are expected to go to school and church and come home to help with household chores, but boys are able to go out and play. This is my biggest motivation for why I do what I do: No matter where I live, I want equality for women and girls everywhere. I want adequate resources invested in our wellness, future, and humanity. That starts with holding people accountable. Being from Haiti made me want to be better about

advocating in spaces where change can happen. I know that if we stay silent, then nothing changes.”

When she arrived at Salem State University in Massachusetts, Richeline became frustrated that university administrators were eager to talk about diversity on campus, but that representation was lacking. “We had a diverse student body from all over the world, but not a lot of professors who reflected the background of the students.” She talked to administrators to ensure students and faculty were heard without even realizing she had become an organizer.

Inspired by Population Connection’s global approach to reproductive health and rights, Richeline took a leap of faith and moved south to become the #Fight4HER organizer in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina.

“Reproductive rights are connected to everything, like immigrant rights and housing. Everyone is going to say that they are at capacity, but we can still show them that our issue intersects with the other issues they care about. If you are advocating for abortion access and family planning in North Carolina, you are already advocating for #Fight4HER.”

Now settled into her new community, Richeline is enjoying the warm weather and the warm residents. “People are happy to help you where they can.”

Kim Ip New Hampshire

Kim grew up with a single mom in a low-income community in Vermont, experiencing firsthand how housing and health care policies impacted people’s wellbeing. “I saw advocacy


work as a way to give back and serve the greater good,” she says. After graduating from the University of New Hampshire and becoming a full-time resident, Kim began organizing with the Biden campaign in New Hampshire, where she recruited and trained volunteers virtually during the pandemic.

Kim later went on to be an advocate for health care policies taking a holistic approach to substance use disorder. She worked to reauthorize Medicaid expansion through the New Hampshire state legislature and advocated for bills that would reduce the cost of

health care and prescription drugs, both critical for maintaining long-term recovery for those struggling with substances. Kim also advocated for policies that would ensure patients with previous convictions could still access housing and jobs. And alongside Planned Parenthood, she went to the New Hampshire State Legislature to advocate for free period products in every public school and public government building.

Next, Kim worked on the New Hampshire Kids Count Data Project doing data analytics and visualization. Kim’s work focused on youth

risk behavior, teen pregnancy, child abuse, and health disparities. She also looked at housing affordability for New Hampshire families, and her analysis helped inform the successful effort to expand Medicaid coverage for youth in kinship care.

Kim is excited to scale up her reproductive rights advocacy to the international stage. “People have this idea that their small communities are all that exist, but you have to realize there is something outside of your bubble that matters, too. We are all connected.” 



The #Fight4HER team at our Washington DC headquarters. **Front, from left:** Lauren Salmieri, Kat Stratford; **Middle, from left:** Kim Ip, Rebecca Harrington; **Back, from left:** Melvine Ouyo, Isabel Song, Kyle Devasier, Richeline Cadet

POPULATION EDUCATION

New Edition of Student Activism Toolkit for a World of 8 Billion

By Barbara Huth, Online Learning Manager

Our annual student video contest has shown us that teens want their voices heard on important global issues. Contest winners often tell us that they are motivated to continue working on the global population challenges introduced in their videos. The 2025 high school first place winner for the child wellbeing topic, Ha Jin Sung, said that after participating in the contest she felt more passionate about advocating for change. “There are sustainable solutions out there which are already making great strides ... we just need to shine light on them and help implement them worldwide.”

We recently updated the Activism Toolkit on our World of 8 Billion website to equip middle and high school students with practical tools to explore local and global challenges and take meaningful steps toward change. The toolkit offers background readings on past contest topics to inspire and deepen understanding of pressing global issues and an awareness journal to help them observe, reflect on, and brainstorm ways to meet community needs. The Activism Toolkit provides student-friendly resources and a roadmap that empowers them to keep making an impact on issues they care about. There are customizable

digital and printable worksheets that help students brainstorm ideas, set goals, and develop activism plans. We also included a teacher’s guide to help educators incorporate the toolkit into their classes, but the materials are designed so that students can navigate them easily on their own.

An activism roadmap

The centerpiece of the toolkit is a five-step roadmap, which is equipped with tools, ideas, and structure to help students along their activism journey. It serves as an approachable framework for young people to organize and carry out an activism project. There are downloadable, ready-to-use resources throughout, including an impact plan

to set goals and an activism commitment sheet to track progress and achievements.

1. Learn About Activism

provides background on activism and its role in raising awareness and driving change and introduces the different pathways an activist can take to make a difference, whether as individuals or collectively.

2. Choose and Define Your Challenge

asks young activists to consider why working on their issue is important to them and members of their community, and what changes they would like to see locally and globally.

3. Explore Activism Activities

presents some of the many ways student

activism can take shape, from small daily habits to larger community efforts. We group these into four categories: daily changes, creative expression, civic engagement, and amplifying voices.

4. Set Goals and Plan

prompts students to create an impact plan for what they want to accomplish. In this step, they will further research their challenge, plan the activities they will undertake, and set a timeline to accomplish their goals.

5. Take Action and Share


encourages students to implement their plans, take action, share their progress with others, and consider the next steps needed to continue making a difference.

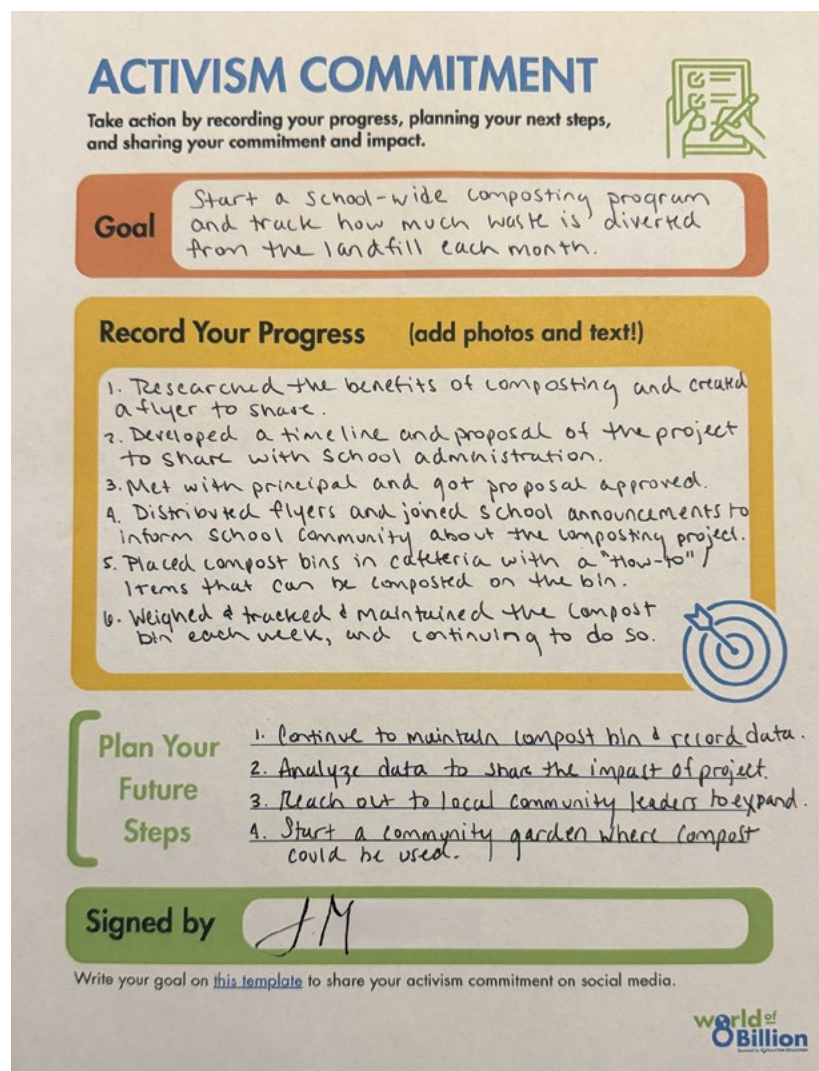
For the different types of activism presented in Step 3, we include specific examples paired with helpful outside resources. Students could take individual actions such as trying to eat local foods that are in season, or they could take collective actions such as

starting a school composting program. They could create art — a song, a photograph, a mural, or something else — that illuminates an issue. They could develop civic skills by contacting their legislators or joining a global youth organization such as the UNESCO Youth Climate Action Network. The roadmap also includes resources to help teens share their message, such as a template for writing a letter to the editor of a publication, a guide to starting a podcast, and websites for finding and attending, or even organizing, a rally. These examples show students practical, personal actions they can take and group efforts they can participate in to amplify their collective impact.

Commitment to activism

The goal of the toolkit is to inspire young people to remain informed, engaged citizens on the environmental and social issues they care about. When students finish the roadmap, they are encouraged to continue reflecting, revising, and revisiting earlier steps to make their mark as global changemakers.

The Activism Toolkit is available on the World of 8 Billion website at worldof8billion.org/activism-toolkit. 



ACTIVISM COMMITMENT
Take action by recording your progress, planning your next steps, and sharing your commitment and impact.

Goal Start a school-wide composting program and track how much waste is diverted from the landfill each month.

Record Your Progress (add photos and text!)

1. Researched the benefits of composting and created a flyer to share.
2. Developed a timeline and proposal of the project to share with school administration.
3. Met with principal and got proposal approved.
4. Distributed flyers and joined school announcements to inform school community about the composting project.
5. Placed compost bins in cafeteria with a "how-to" items that can be composted on the bin.
6. Weighed & tracked & maintained the compost bin each week, and continuing to do so.

Plan Your Future Steps

1. Continue to maintain compost bin & record data.
2. Analyze data to share the impact of project.
3. Reach out to local community leaders to expand.
4. Start a community garden where compost could be used.

Signed by JM

Write your goal on [this template](#) to share your activism commitment on social media.

World of 8 Billion

CARTOON



Custom cartoon by Joel Pett

Plan for your legacy.



"Including a gift to Population Connection in my will was a natural choice, given my values.

My legacy gift is a powerful way to help ensure my grandkids, great nieces and nephews, and all creatures great and small can still enjoy a healthy life on this planet for years to come."

Rebecca Weiner, ZPG Society Member, with her husband, Mike, in Great Smoky Mountains National Park



Creating a will is about more than planning for the future. It's an opportunity to reflect on the values that matter most to you. After providing for your loved ones, you might consider designating a remainder gift, or a percentage, to Population Connection.

Your legacy can help build a healthier, more sustainable future for people and the planet.

Make your will for free!

We've partnered with FreeWill to provide this free, legal service.

Visit freewill.com/populationconnection to get started.



To learn more, visit popconnect.org/legacy, email legacy@popconnect.org, or call **202-974-7756**.





Population Connection
2120 L Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
POPULATION CONNECTION

Give through your IRA tax-free.

If you're 70½ or older, you can make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) from your IRA to Population Connection, up to \$111,000 per person in 2026.

A QCD may reduce your taxable income and help satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD).

Making a gift through your IRA is simple. Contact us or your IRA administrator to find out how.



To learn more, visit popconnect.org/legacy,
email legacy@popconnect.org, or call **202-974-7756**.



*Kathy and Julian Donahue
ZPG Society Members*

