

Professor Sigurd Skirbekk points out that European countries have earlier rejected the Germans when they used the argument of lebensraum as a motivation for their foreign policy. We should do the same thing now when other countries invoke the argument that they lack space for their population. According to him, there is plenty of literature available about the ecological challenges the world will be facing in this century. Running a too liberal immigration policy while refusing to confront such unpleasant moral issues is not a sustainable alternative in the long run. We will then only push difficult dilemmas onto future generations.

Baron Bodessey, GatesofVienna.com

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Migration Perspectives

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At first glance, migration to western countries would appear to be a clever combination of self-help and help for others. Imported labor can be seen as a domestic ploy to compensate for a low reproduction rate in the West, while at the same time helping the Third World reduce its population surplus. A change in perspective is vital in order to understand that migration cannot provide a steady influx of help from countries with high birth rates and that reproduction based on immigration levels can stymie efforts to maintain key values in western civilization.¹

The chosen perspective for presenting these issues is not the only element of interest here. The forms of argumentation, as well as the methods used in neutralizing antagonists' credibility, are in themselves interesting fields of study. The choice of emphasis and de-emphasis plainly demonstrate the selection principles in the dominant culture of interpretation. Some psychologists claim that studies of taboos are some of the most rewarding avenues to cultural understanding. The stronger the taboo, the greater the potentially harbored insight. How heated the debate on immigration becomes will indicate whether we are dealing with positions

rife with taboos, all of which might have a major impact on the way we relate to our culture.

Before we say more about the debate itself and turn our attention to the media's argumentation style, we will briefly describe the trends in population growth, as clearly as demographers have been able to verify them.

Global population growth figures in modern times are quite dramatic from a historical standpoint. The number of people living on this planet is thought to have reached its first billion during the time of Napoleon Bonaparte, two hundred years ago. The two billion milestone was reached shortly before Hitler came to power in around 1930. The three billion mark was reached during the post-war 1950s. The four billion mark was reached during the period of colonial liberation during the 1970s. The five billion mark was passed when Soviet communism collapsed at the end of the 1980s.ⁱⁱ The six billion mark was reached by the end of the 20th century. Population growth in the 20th century was primarily due to improved survival rates in the poorest parts of the world. The so-called developing countries experienced an overall explosion in population of around 1.3 to 4.1 billion people during a dramatically short time span, from 1930 to 1990.ⁱⁱⁱ However, considering developing countries as a separate category may be misleading. Birth rates vary tremendously among Third World countries.

Future estimates of population growth must be based on statistical computations of birth rates and conditions affecting them. Even though expert demographers differ in their predictions, these variations are not pronounced enough to cast doubt on their overall calculations. Based on figures released from the UN's demographic division in 1999, a mean estimate of global population growth suggests that a figure close to 9 billion people could be reached by 2050.^{iv} If birth rates were to continue to escalate at current levels – although few believe this likely – the projection would reach 14.9 billion people already by 2050, and 296 billion by 2150.

Based on the UN sources, mean estimates suggest that the population of North America will rise from 172 million to 392 million during the period 1950-2050. The figures for Latin America, based on the same estimates, are expected to rise from 167 million to 809 million. The greatest increases are expected to occur in Africa and Asia. Relatively speaking, the population of Africa is expected to escalate most, from 221 million in 1950 to some 1760 million by the middle of the 21st century. The African rise is particularly worrying, as it is not expected to stabilize during the 21st century; on the contrary, it could even rise to three billion, according to some projections. All in all, African fertility during the 1990s was estimated at an average of 5.7 children per woman.^v Nevertheless, in absolute

terms, the Asian population is expected to rise most rapidly during the 21st century; from about 1.4 billion in 1950 to 5.2 billion by 2050.

Asia's urban population is expected to double during the next thirty years, and Asia as a whole could account for over half the world's population. This will lead to domestic dramatic social changes, such as new, vast population concentrations in major cities. The Asian Development Bank estimates that the number of "mega cities" harboring more than 10 million inhabitants will soar from nine to twenty by the year 2025. Half of these will contain more than 20 million inhabitants. It is estimated that, by 2025, more than 4 billion people will be living in urban clusters scattered around the Third World, as opposed to barely 1.5 billion today. Mexico City is expected to swell to more than 24 million inhabitants, with Sao Paulo mushrooming to more than 23 million inhabitants.

All this will lead to a rise in overpopulation, with attendant social stress and, in all likelihood, weaker regional cultural ties than is customary in traditional rural towns. This trend is bound to exert enormous pressure on emigration to areas with a relative shortage of people. As for the Mediterranean region, the population of northern Africa is expected to rise by more than 100 million between 1990 and 2025,^{vi} while the birth rate in southern European countries currently stands at between 60% and 70% of the reproduction level. While Europe as a whole contained twice as many people as Africa in 1950 (547 million to 224 million), the figures at the turn of the century were almost identical. However, the population of Africa is expected to reach 2,046 million people by 2050, as opposed to Europe's 638 million, according to the modest scenario described by UN demographers.^{vii}

Another factor putting pressure on emigration to Europe is the advances in communications. Both technical modes of transport and audio-visual communication, which project an idealized image of living conditions in the North, are significant in this context. In addition, most potential target countries will have established immigrant environments capable of absorbing new immigrants.^{viii}

Demographers are predicting major discrepancies in Asian population growth. While China, on account of its birth control policies, can only expect a "modest" rise from today's 1.2 billion people to approximately 1.5 billion in 2050 – a rate that largely reflects age distribution and the fact that people are living longer – the situation in other Asian countries will vary. According to some estimates Pakistan, one of China's neighbors, could expect a population growth on an altogether different order. Pakistan is a country 778,720 km in size, with 74 million inhabitants in 1975 when the country's present borders were fixed. This figure has almost doubled within a single generation, and might double again by the middle of this century.^{ix}

The net rate of emigration from Pakistan during the mid-1990s is estimated at 17 per 1,000 inhabitants. With such a huge increase in population, one might expect emigration levels to have risen proportionately. Conversely, emigration appears to be determined for the most part by domestic social tensions, which in turn are linked to overpopulation levels. When overpopulation levels rise, the emigration rate tends to climb. A demographic and economic imbalance between different parts of the world will change the terms for migration. As several quantitative studies show, the risk of conflict between population groups rises in proportion to the number and concentration of immigrants.^x

In view of the anticipated rise in growth rates in countries with limited resources, a broad political consensus exists in the West that we bear a fair amount of responsibility for these countries. This accountability is reflected in our moral obligation to provide emergency aid, medical and technical assistance, as well as economic development aid to enable these countries to develop on their own terms. The philosophy behind this approach has always been that, when living standards begin rising, the desire to have many children will taper off – and, with any luck, stabilize – voluntarily and at an acceptable level.

These expectations are questionable and unrealistic for a number of reasons. As already mentioned, the so-called “law of demographic transition” does not operate in a cultural vacuum. Furthermore, counting on living standards to bring population growth to a halt does not seem ecologically rational, especially if we assume that everyone has the right to a consumer-oriented lifestyle consistent with the western pattern.

Access to arable land worldwide is limited. According to some estimates, the Earth’s land-based ecosystems have enjoyed an annual production potential of 150 billion tons of organic material. Human beings have already destroyed approximately 12% of this resource potential, in addition to confiscating 27% for their own purposes. This means that a single species on this planet has granted itself sole user rights to almost 40% of the Earth’s organic production, leaving only 60% to be shared among the millions of other land-based fauna and flora.

Moreover, the 40% that we have claimed for our own use is the easiest to exploit. It is unlikely that we would be able to utilize an additional 40%, even if we felt entitled to do so, and even if a doubling of the global population might suggest that we ought to.^{xi} But access to resources is not the only discouraging factor here. To be environmentally sound and not prove destructive to vital ecosystems, waste management will require vast tracts of land. According to one estimate, humans would need 1.2 planets the size of Earth just to maintain long-term conditions for

ecosystems and simultaneously provide today's entire population with living standards on a par with those of the West.^{xii}

Whether these projections are completely reliable or not, it is indisputable that natural ecosystems limit our culturally legitimized right to self-realization. This means that ecological stumbling blocks will also pose a challenge to a liberal ideology that has created open-ended values out of economic growth and individual self-realization.

Ecological challenges cannot be defined solely in terms of consumer patterns in well-developed countries or merely in terms of population surges in less developed countries. In the early 1990s, population experts from the London School of Economics estimated the ecological responsibility for the "consumer societies" and the "birth societies" at a 60/40 distribution rate. They also reported that it was difficult to pin down guesstimates with exact figures, so their conclusions were based on the premise of sudden change. In 1997, the London-based World Watch Institute singled out the following countries as the greatest threat to ecological development: The United States, Russia, Japan, China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, and Germany. Vast numbers of consumers, as well as a high consumption rate per person, can have serious consequences.^{xiii}

One might have expected that demographic and ecological factors had formed a united front in terms of the commentary on migration. The debate on migration encompasses a range of topics. Migration influences demography and ecology, cultural patterns and family structures, economic disparity and employment prospects, and legislative resolutions in the West – apart from its influence on human resources in poverty-stricken, overpopulated areas of a world in which conflict is rife. In view of this multifarious reality, the basic premises of the ongoing immigration debate appear to be severely restricted.

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