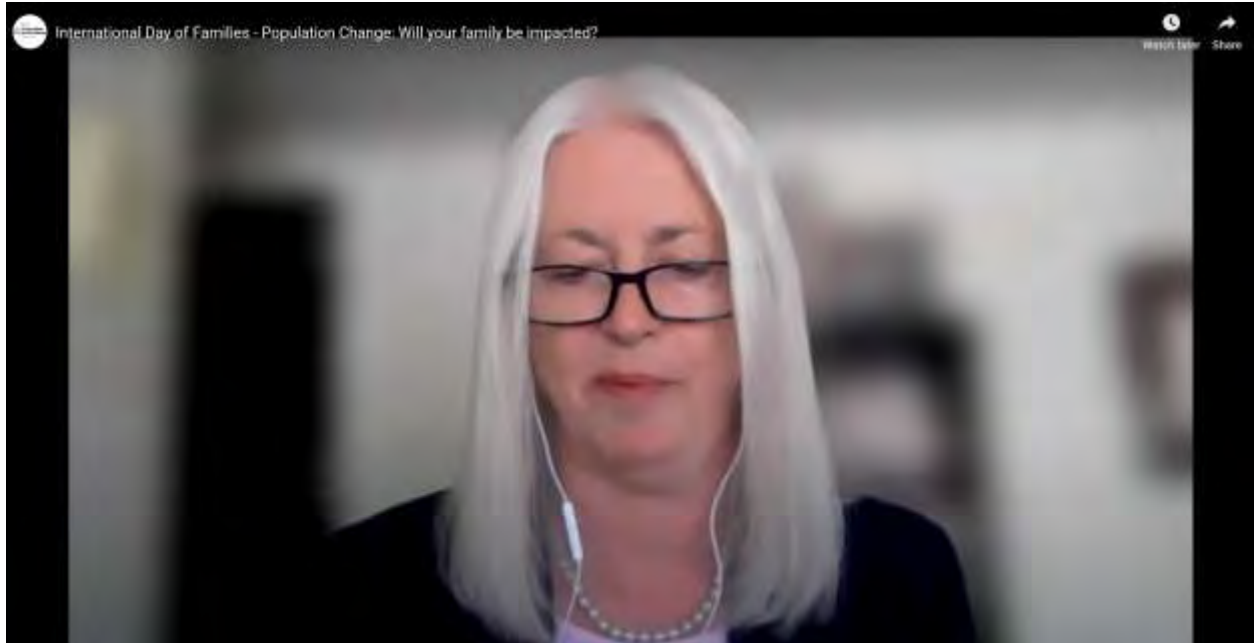


UN NGO Committee on the Family Commemorates International Day of Families

Lynn Walsh
May 16, 2023



UPF International - As the world just reached a record population height of eight billion and yet many countries are distressed with their extremely low fertility rates, the topic of "Population Change: How Might It Impact Your Family?" was a timely subject. The program, held virtually on May 16, 2023 commemorating the UN International Day of Families, was organized by the NGO Committee on the Family, NY of which UPF is an executive member. There were approximately 40 attendees.



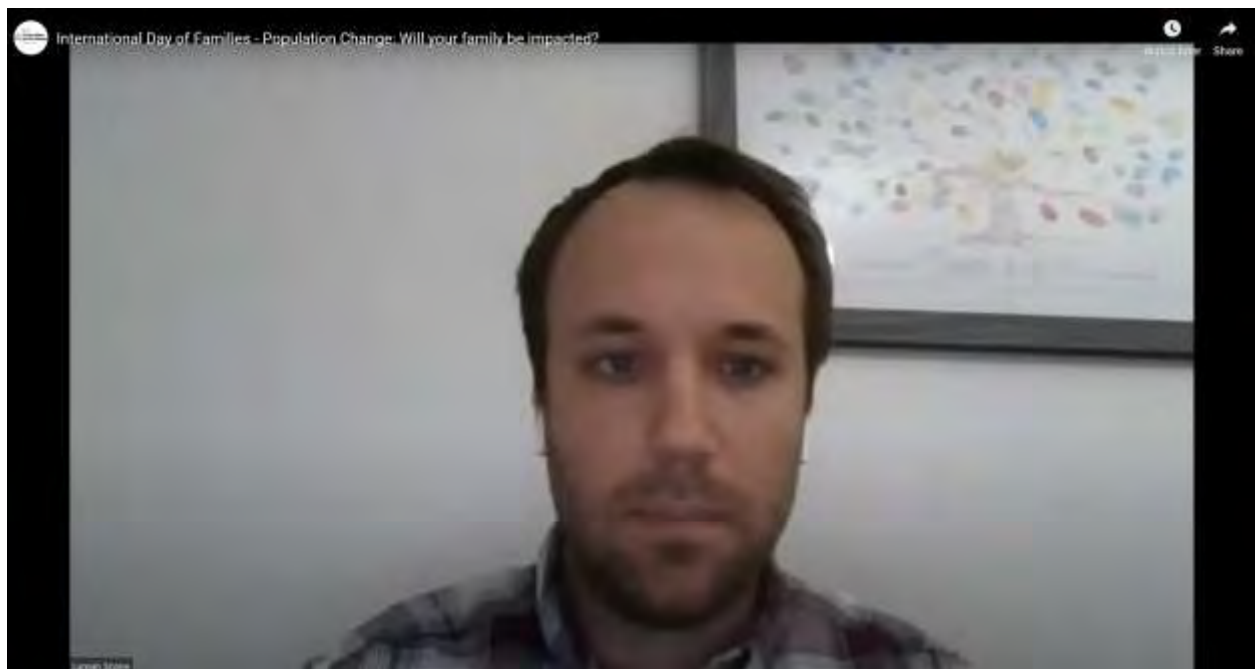
Karoline Schmid, Ph.D., Chief, Fertility and Population Aging Section Population Division, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), presented in-depth data and analysis on "Population Eight Billion: Considerations for Families." She included many of the pros and cons and ups and downs in her data. The world population will continue to increase into 2050. The eight countries experiencing an increase in their young population can benefit from the "demographic dividend" in their economy with the plenitude of workers. However, the "youth bulge" of developing countries leads to an intensified demand for education, health care and employment and if unmet, can lead to crime and social unrest.

The data show that even the countries whose population is increasing now, are facing a slow but steady inevitable decline. Sixty-one countries are experiencing a substantial population decline of 1% and a few are faced with a drastic 20% reduction. In fact, almost all countries have reached the "demographic transition," moving from high fertility and mortality rates to low fertility and mortality rates. Of course, it is great news that more people are living longer and healthier. Also, with fewer children per family, more attention and resources can be dedicated to each child. However, these demographic changes mean the number of those 65 years and older are increasing in greater proportion to the declining working-age population. The number of elderly worldwide will double from 761 million now to 1.6 billion in 2050. In

Japan an alarming 30% of their population is 65 and older already and Korea is projected to have 40% of their population being 65 and older in 2050. With this imbalance, the burden on the younger workers who are the service providers, economy builders, and taxpayers is huge if not unwieldy for a country.

Dr. Schmid pointed out that around the world most women want more children than they have. Having children has become more and more challenging with the greater demand to attain higher levels of education, the higher cost of having children, and the need for the two incomes from working parents. Women are especially stretched as they often do most of the household work, and are the main care providers for their children as well as for elderly parents. This partly explains why most women report that they are not having their desired number of children.

One common concern with population increase is an over reliance on fossil fuels, the need for waste management, and damage to the climate. Dr. Schmid pointed out that the countries whose consumption is most unsustainable are the high-income countries facing population decline. Those developing countries experiencing rapid growth are not the worst in the area of consumption and waste.



Our second expert, Lyman Stone, chief information officer at Demographic Intelligence, a research fellow at the Institute for Family Studies (IFS) and an adjunct fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), spoke on "Family Factors Impacting Population Change." Mr. Stone referred to excellent data from UNFPA and UNPD and echoed Dr. Schmid's summation of the global "demographic transition" as more countries are concerned with increasing or maintaining their population rather than reducing it. He warned that although some UN projections see a possibility of fertility trends increasing as he looks at the data, "if marriage, contraception, fertility, sex-selective abortion, and child mortality trends of 2012-2021 continue, then the developing world will fall below long-run population balance around 2031." This means if the trends for the past nine years continue, the replication rate for many countries will be 1% or less which is drastically below the replication rate of 2.1. So, although the mortality rate is lowering and longevity is increasing, countries will actually be shrinking.

Mr. Stone reiterated Dr. Schmid's comments that only a few countries want a lower birthrate and most, both with high income and low income, would like a higher birthrate. He gave a surprising example from India where women are currently not having their desired number of children. Where most people think of India as suffering from overpopulation, research shows that on average women in India today are raising actually two fewer children than they want. This report is contrary to the popular assumption about fertility. Mr. Stone pointed out that as the UN is promoting "reproductive rights," then the fact that most women want more children needs to be addressed. Women's desire for having more babies is quite a different issue than the demand for more contraception and easy access to abortion that we normally hear at the UN.

Mr. Stone raised the question of what is causing fertility to fall. Improved contraception, delayed and decline in marriage, and increased expense of raising children are some of the reasons. Another factor is that many working women have to or are choosing to stay at home to care for their children. A large number of mothers would prefer to care for their young children themselves. However, mothers can lose employment opportunities when leaving work to care for children. With women's income in general rising and men's declining, the loss of income can be prohibitive. The decline in marriage is also a major factor because married women have more children than unmarried. Data confirm that a decrease in marriage means a clear decrease in fertility. Mr. Stone stated: "Marital fertility is the core driver of overall fertility."

Mr. Stone gave a plea for the UN to encourage a pro-natal policy, by experimenting with and researching the result of policies in areas such as housing, tax relief, and promoting marriage. He pointed out that the "marriage penalty" - reducing benefits of low- and middle-income couples when they get married - is problematic as it ends up reducing the rate of marriage which decreases fertility. We were honored to have Ms. Magdolna Pongor, Second Secretary of the Permanent Representative of the Mission of Hungary, in the audience. She joined the webinar by reviewing some of Hungary's many pro-natal policies. Hungary eliminates all taxes for life to mothers with four or more children, provides pension allowance which includes time at home taking care of children, and adds tax incentives which help both lower and higher income couples stay married and raise children. Hungary's concern about their birthrate is quite serious. The country has invested more than 5% of its GDP in pro-natal policies. Ms. Pongor was happy to report that after ten years, their fertility rate has gone from 1.2 to 1.5 and has remained steady. This evidence, though a very challenging task without a clear path for all countries, should encourage the UN and all of us to help couples have the children and families they want. It was a hopeful note on which to end our International Day of Families program.