

Why families are essential for future climate protection policy

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on “Climate change and Families”
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Prof. Dr. Martin Bujard

"We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth"




Greta Thunberg, 2019

“Basically, there’s a scientific consensus that the lives of children are going to be very difficult. And it does lead, I think, young people to have a legitimate question: Is it okay to still have children?”



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 201



"You can protect children while fighting climate change and systematic corruption by refusing to procreate."

<https://birthstrikemovement.org/>

Total Fertility Rate in Europe since 2000 1.4 to 1.5
USA 1.6 in 2023
East Asia 0.9 Korea, etc

Motivation

- **Climate change** of high relevance for the sustainability and the future of human beings.
- **Ecological footprint is too high**, Ecological footprint is basically the product of population size and the way of living and using resources per each person.
- Some climate change protagonists argue for **birth strike**, helping climate by having no children.

BUT:

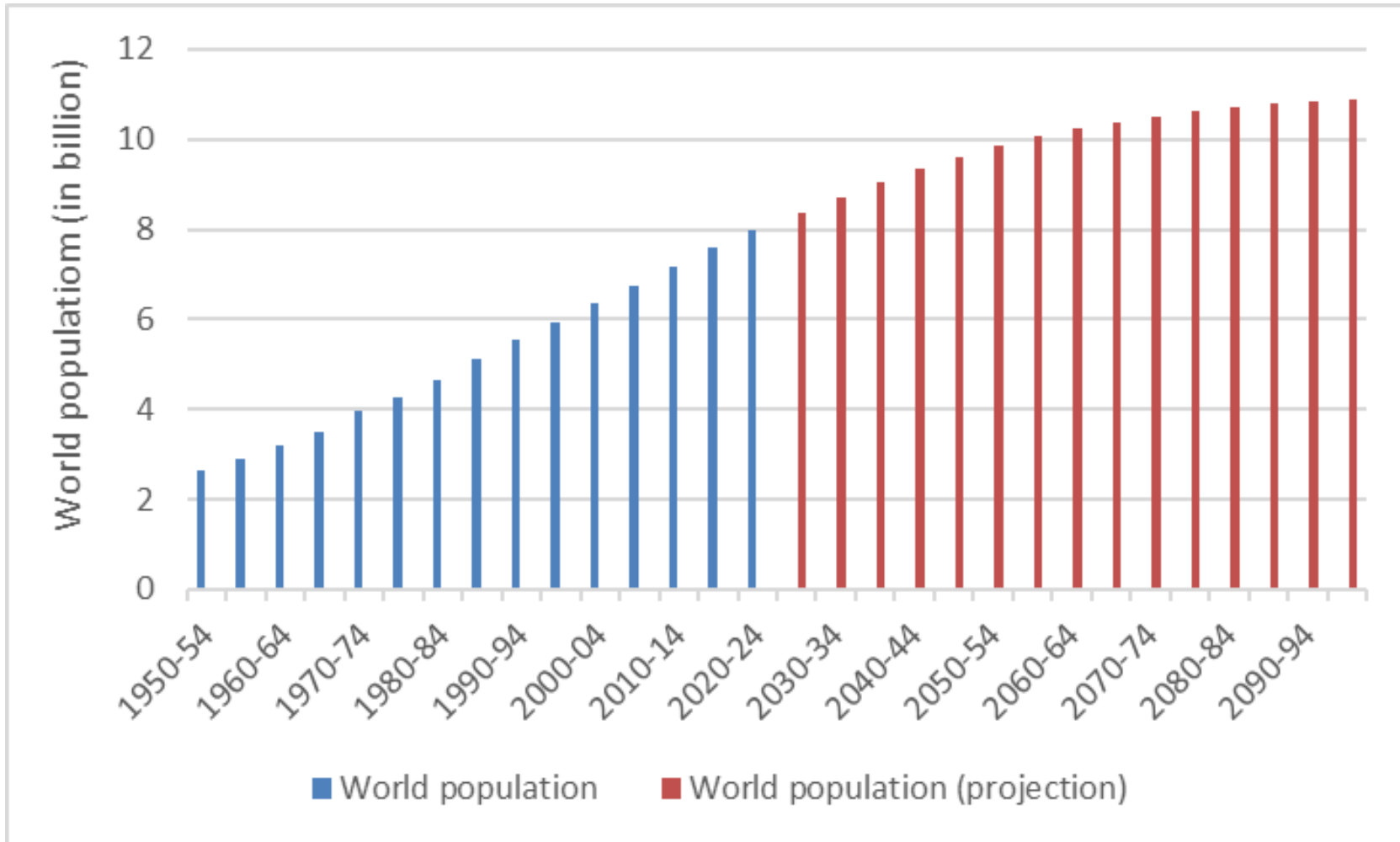
- **Generational discourse** on climate change within families.
- Young generation as a accelerator of climate protection? (**Fridays for Future**)

Are families and the birth of children the problem or maybe rather part of the solution?

Population development and ecological footprint

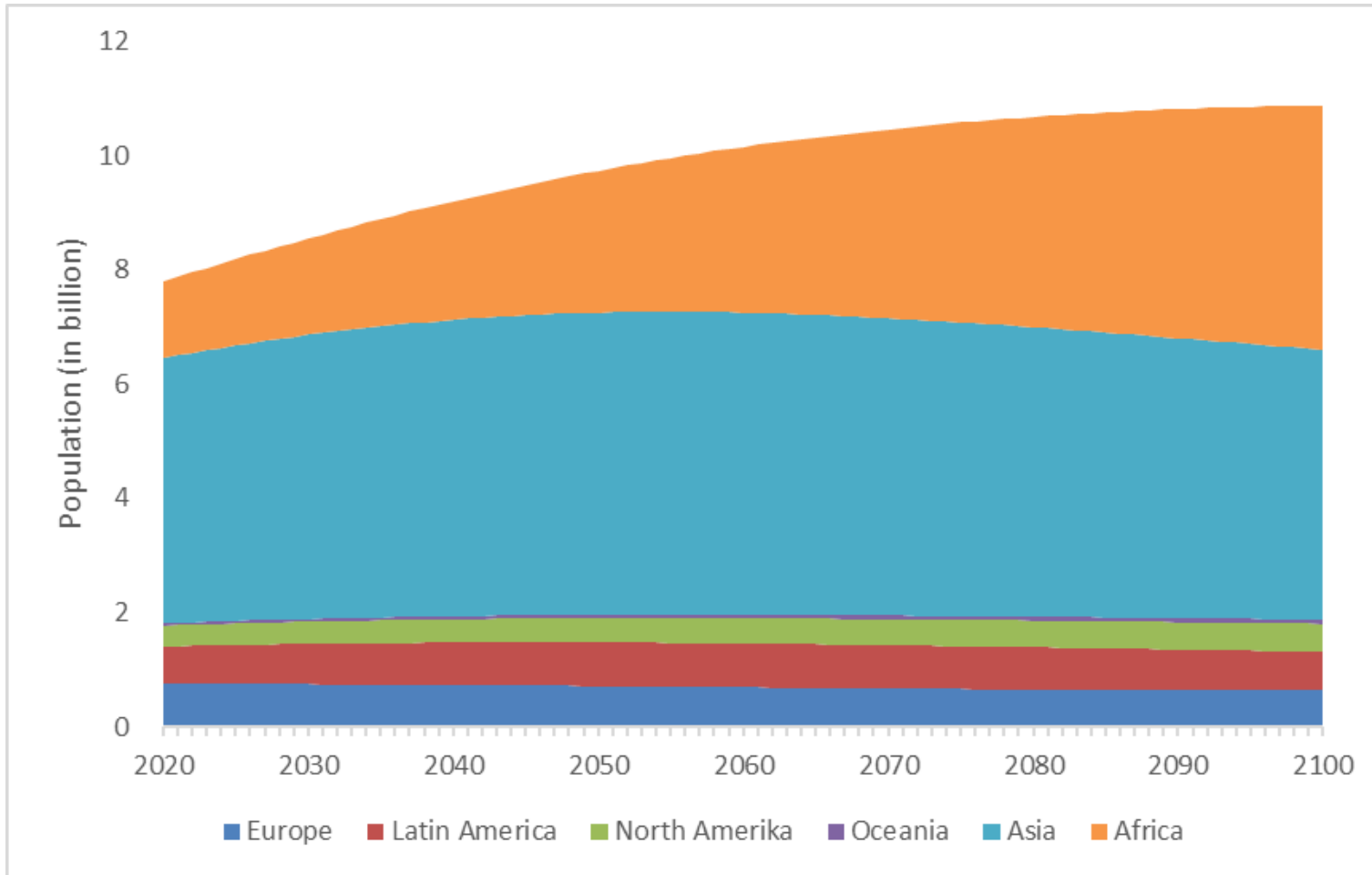
- "A quarter of the total increase in emissions is attributable to the growth of emissions per capita, whereas three-quarters are due to population growth." (Geerlagh, Lupi, Galeotti 2023)
- Analysis on the past, but how is the future? (Climate protection, world population, etc.)
- Fundamental differences between Global North and Global South; the latter with an increase in population but lower ecological footprint per capita

World Population 1950 - 2100



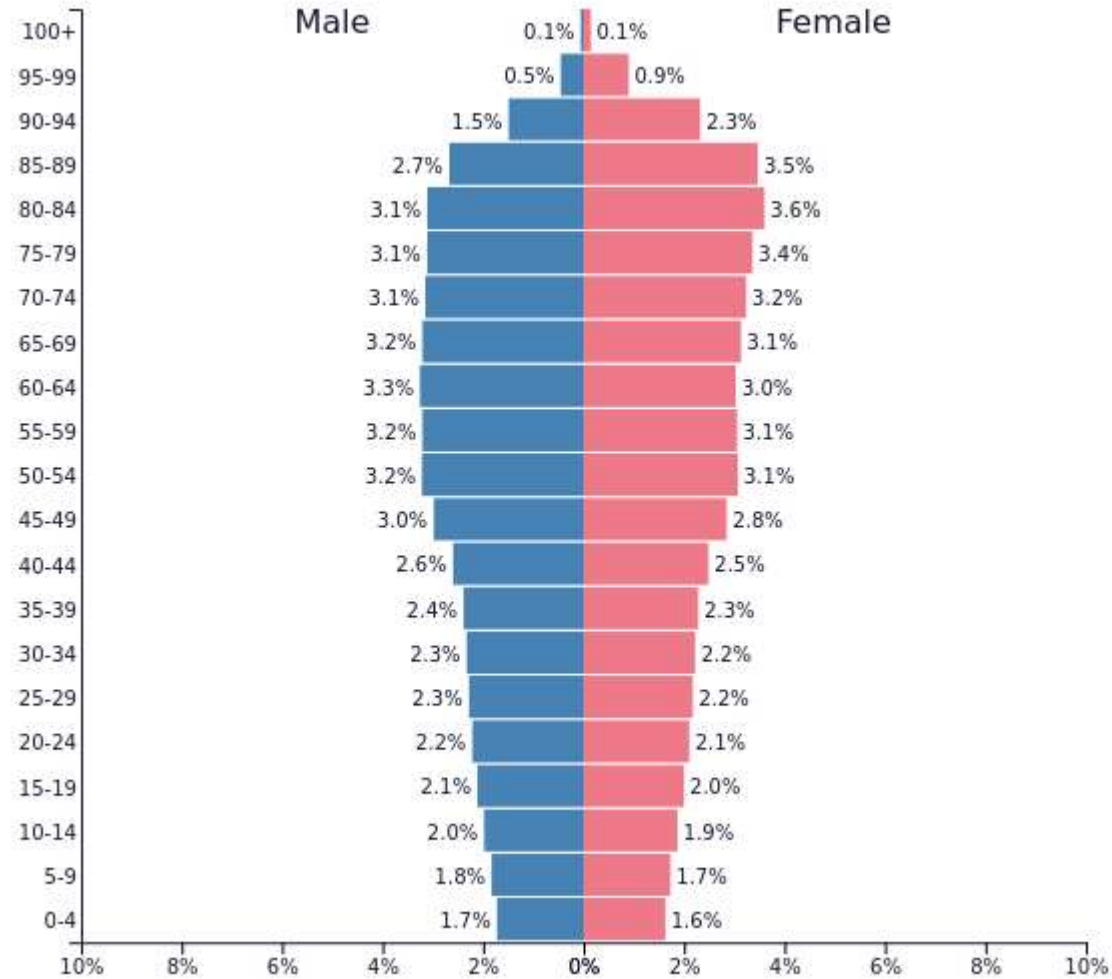
Source: UN World Population Prospects

World population by regions 2020 - 2100



Source: UN World Population Prospects, Bujard 2022.

Example of an aging population: Italy 2060



Source: Population pyramid net

Climate security measures are decisive

Emission reduction:

- Use of fossil fuel for power, transportation, and industry contributes largely to increased emissions and climate change (UN 2024)
- innovative technologies using renewable energy, such as solar, wind, and geothermal, are at the forefront of climate protection efforts From 2022, significant increases were seen in some technologies: solar PV (+85%), wind (+60%), electric cars (+35%) (IEA report 2024)

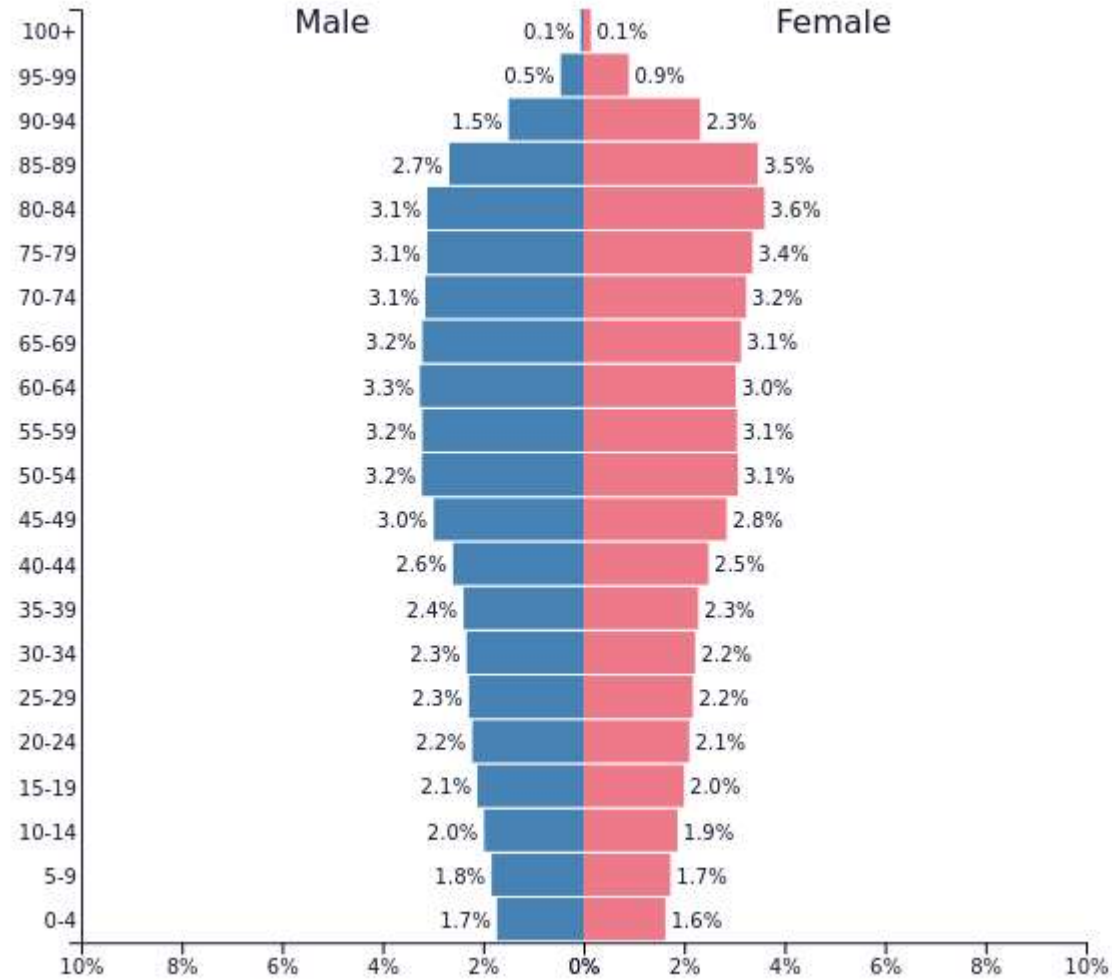
Agriculture:

- More vegetables, less meat, less milk
- **However, the transition to renewable energy isn't fast enough as talked about at COP28**

Young generations as the avantgarde for technic, economic, politics and societal change

- Youth involvement has played a central role in the climate movement
- Fridays for Future: a small generation in Europe
- Young generation: Climate anxiety and dissatisfaction with government responses (Hickman et al. 2021)
- Climate protection needs young generation for
 - voting at elections (majority for climate policy)
 - technical innovations and engineering
 - converting the economy to be climate-friendly
 - promote a climate-friendly lifestyle to the older generation
- **Societal change is often from one generation to the next, and hardly within a generation**

Example of an aging population: Italy 2060



58 % older than 50 years

32 % younger than 40 years

Source: Population pyramid net

- Discourse on climate security is predominantly done in families; intergenerational learning (Lawson et al. 2018, 2019; Mead et al. 2012)
- Young generations and their parents and grandparents have a longer horizon because babies born in 2025 will have a high chance to live until 2125.
- They have to think more long-term than the baby boomer generation aged 60 with a perspective to live until 2050 – unless they think of their families and descendants.
- **Importance of the family as an entity shaping climate change engagement and especially important of acknowledging and including parents, adolescents, and children as climate actors.**

Problems of an antinatalistic discourse for countries with low fertility

- Antinatalistic discourse – such as increasing birth strike debate in Europe and US - could result in providing norms and pressure against families with children.
- Antinatalistic norms and policies have a long tradition since Malthus' in the 19th Century and the overpopulation debate in the 1960s (Malthus 1804; Ehrlich 1971, see Bujard 2022)
- In Europe, USA and East Asia fertility is clear below replacement rate, with negative long-term consequences on economy, social security system, national budget
- Let women decide based on access to education, family policy and reproductive autonomy:

“Effective steps humanity can take to transition to sustainability (...) (h) further reducing fertility rates by ensuring that women and men have access to education and voluntary family-planning services, especially where such resources are still lacking” Ripple et al. 2017 (15,364 scientist signatories from 184 countries)

Conclusion



In the last years there are **fundamental changes**

- (1) in population development,
- (2) in economic development and respective production of climate gas, and
- (3) discourses on climate protection, in particular in the young generation and within families.

Antinatalistic discourses in countries with below-replacement fertility are counterproductive.

Since families can be essential actors for future climate protection policy, their role should be more considered and strengthened.

Thank you

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