

# UN warns against alarmism as world's population reaches 8bn milestone

**UNFPA head urges countries to focus on helping women, children and marginalised people most vulnerable to demographic change**



Kenyans on a beach in Mombasa. The world's population is projected to reach 8bn next month but the pace of global population growth has halved since the 1960s to under 1%. Photograph: AP

[About this content](#)

**[Lizzy Davies](#)**

Tue 18 Oct 2022 06.00 BST

The world must not engage in “population alarmism” as the number of people living on Earth nears 8 billion, a senior UN official has said.

The global population is projected to reach that milestone **on 15 November**, with some commentators expressing worries about the impact of the growing number on a world already struggling with huge inequality, the climate crisis, and conflict-fuelled displacement and migration.

However, Dr Natalia Kanem, executive director of **the UN Population Fund** (UNFPA), urged countries not to panic but instead focus on helping the

women, children and marginalised people who were most vulnerable to demographic change.

“I realise this moment might not be celebrated by all. Some **express concerns** that our world is overpopulated, with far too many people and insufficient resources to sustain their lives. I am here to say clearly that the sheer number of human lives is not a cause for fear,” she said.

Kanem said that if governments focused on the numbers alone they ran the risk of imposing population controls that had been shown by history to be “ineffective and even dangerous”.

“From forced sterilisation campaigns to restrictions on family planning and contraception, we are still reckoning with the lasting impact of policies intended to reverse, or in some cases to accelerate, population growth,” she said.

“And we cannot repeat the egregious violations of human rights ... that rob women of their ability to decide whether [or] when to become pregnant, if at all. **Population** alarmism: it distracts us from what we should be focused on.”

As a result of falling birthrates, the pace of worldwide population growth, which reached a recorded peak at just over 2% a year in the late 1960s, has now fallen below 1%.

However, the global picture is more varied than ever before. The UN estimates that about 60% of people live in countries with fertility levels below the recognised **replacement level** (when a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next) of an average of 2.1 births for every woman.

At the other end of the spectrum, just eight countries, including Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Philippines, are forecast to account for half of all population growth by 2050. One of those countries, **India**, is expected to pass China from next year and become the world’s most populous country.

Kanem said the picture could also be mixed in places where new immigrant communities had a higher birthrate than the country in which they had arrived. But this difference, where it existed, should not be “manipulated” to stoke social tensions, she added.

“These are not causes for fear. In fact, in terms of the ageing crisis, we’re going to have to look for solutions that include migration of people who are willing to help with elder care etc,” she said. “While there may be some variability ... this should not stoke xenophobia and hatred of ‘the other’, which sometimes this type of dynamic is manipulated in order to do.”

Earlier this month, the Sun on Sunday reported that an unnamed British government minister had floated the idea of encouraging a baby boom by giving tax cuts to women who have more children.