

Hard and long-term choices about population and the environment

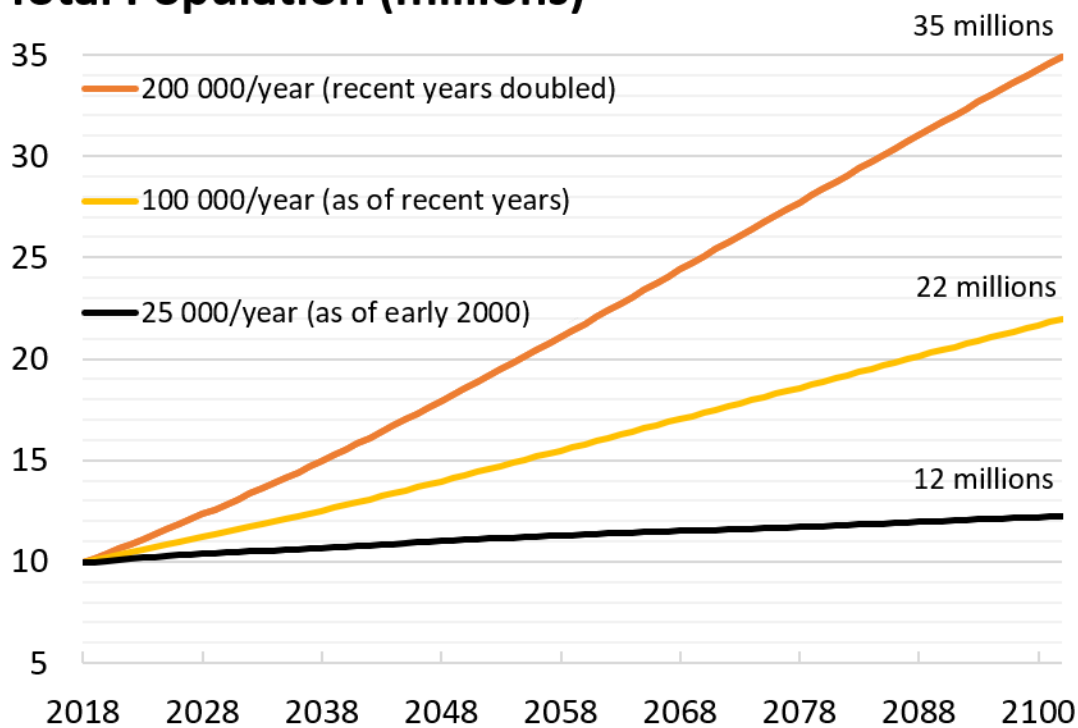
In our debate, "[Environmental reasons speak for more limited immigration](#)", we emphasized two points: partly that immigration policy strongly affects Sweden's future population size, and that large population growth through immigration has negative environmental impacts.

No one has questioned the first point. Sweden, about 10 million inhabitants, is a developed country with relatively low birth rates (about 1.9 children per woman). Population growth is primarily caused by net immigration. Our scenarios indicate that, from 2018, the immigration level, about 20,000 people per year, would lead to 12 million people in 2100, while the level in the last few years (100,000 per year) would lead to 22 million.

The higher level gives 10 million more people: we would double our population during the time our children are now growing up. This means more transportation and travel. Housing, heating, hospitals, schools, airports and infrastructure requirements are increasing. Our resource intake is increasing in Sweden, but also in other countries, for our consumption.

At open borders, as several [parties](#) argue, immigration can be higher than 100,000 people per year. The population of 2100 could then be several times greater than today, in a scenario we illustrated with a net immigration of 200,000 people a year. The level of 25,000 per year, on the other hand, would instead lead to approximately the same population as today, with lower pressure on environment and nature. Population policy involves a choice, in which all the consequences for society should be taken into account.

Total Population (millions)



Our second point is that a larger population has negative environmental impacts within and beyond our borders, and affects how we live up to international conventions and agreements. Here we emphasized decreasing green areas and fields, and more greenhouse gases. But many other environmental problems are also exacerbating as the population grows.

[Josefin Wangel with some others](#) writes that we are painting an “unnecessary gloomy picture”. Those who worked to conserve nature know that when threatened, natural areas often give way to [Homo sapiens](#). Those who are worried about congestion and stress can see more cars in front of them, increased transport and increased flying. Those who want to see natural forests and gentle farming can see more fires in forests if the need for wood and biofuel increases, and harder landscaping. Those who want to see less greenhouse gas emissions should know that the UN climate panel noted that people's population deteriorates the climate.

Techniques and policies can somehow alleviate adverse effects, but more people require resources. Our history shows that new technologies also [leads to environmental problems](#). We believe that an environmentally sustainable society should provide space for - and not to degrade - the nature and the forms of life we share the planet with. If we double Sweden's population, we risk creating a less sustainable society, with environmental degradation for future generations.

[Jonas Ebbesson](#) and Josefin Wangel with several debaters think we ignore moral aspects. They do not explicitly explain their own morals, but seem to mean that they do not require a limit to immigration to the country. We do not agree. Our ethics are based on a moral obligation to create an environmentally sustainable society in Sweden, and this is impossible with everlasting population growth. In order to reach this society, of course we must significantly reduce our consumption and, consequently, our [ecological footprint](#) in the world. But it does not eliminate the need to stabilize the population. Total consumption is the product of the number of people times the consumption per individual. Simply addressing one of these two important factors does not provide an environmentally sustainable society.

Does this mean that we reject the duty to help poor and vulnerable people on earth? No not at all. As a citizen of rich Sweden, we have a moral obligation to share wealth and resources, help people in poor countries to a better life, and reduce major global inequalities. Sweden has done a number of important efforts, but they can and should be expanded. But we mean that these obligations do not exempt us from the obligation to create an environmentally sustainable Sweden. These obligations must be balanced.

In this debate there should be a lot of playroom. It is hardly constructive to blame opponents of selfishness, unethical or hidden agenda. We have moral obligations to family, relatives, citizens, other people and other forms of life on earth.

Population growth has generally increased greenhouse gas emissions [proportionally](#). Our article raised population growth in Sweden and increasing emissions here. Although we are a small country, many here want to help reduce emissions, and we try to comply with the Paris agreement. Our critics address the international situation. Emissions are greatest in China, followed by the United States; Per person, emissions are very high in Arctic countries, Australia, Canada, USA and New Zealand (see, for example, Wikipedia).

Several debaters believe that greenhouse gas emissions are independent of where people are. This has been studied more closely in the [USA](#) and [Australia](#). From the United States, immigration and hence population growth were significantly contributed to increasing emissions: between 1980 and 2005, immigration to the United States accounted for 5% of the annual global (note global!) increase in greenhouse gases. In Australia, which has major environmental problems, the population is also caused by immigration. The study shows that continued immigration would increase global emissions - Australia's climate target until the middle of the century becomes difficult to reach. In [New Zealand](#), economist Michael Reddell suggests that reduced immigration is a way to reduce emissions there.

The fact that immigration would not affect greenhouse gas emissions is therefore an assault taken out of the air. We agree, of course, that all countries with high emissions per person must reduce them significantly (especially the United States).

We notice the problematic global population increase in our project. According to the United Nations, for example, Africa's population can increase from 1.3 billion to 4.5 billion in 2100, unless developments are reversed. Extensive direct support from the EU and other countries is required for this hard-hit continent. Population growth is an important contributory cause of starvation there (see [analysis](#)). A recent study on [Nigeria](#) found that significantly lower birth rates until 2100 could yield 15% higher income per person and 35% lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Perhaps most importantly, family planning programs are also supported by the countries themselves. [Social norms](#) that govern high birth rates must be broken. Education of many more women can increase their self-determination. We present a lot of knowledge and research on the subject ([see our website](#)). It is difficult to find an environmental issue in the world that is more rigorously treated - almost taboo-borne - than the global and national population growth. We are grateful that a debate has now begun and looks forward to further dialogue!

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