

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your response in ETC Göteborg to our article recently in SvD. Some of the points you make we emphatically agree with. These include the need for those of us in the rich world to work to consume less and to help people in poor countries consume more, and on the need to work harder not to export our environmental impacts. We agree with you that Sweden and other developed countries cannot isolate themselves from the rest of the world.

Above all, we agree that overpopulation in the developing world should be responded to with “proven methods,” such as making family planning services more widely available and improving education for girls and young women. Doing so is not just important for environmental issues, or for the future—it is important to helping poor people in the developing world right now. A recent study found that greater numbers of children are strongly positively correlated with food insecurity among Nigerian families. That study, and much related material can be found on our project’s webpage under Blog:

<https://overpopulation-project.com>

On other points, we disagree. You write that “no one wants immigration levels as high as 200,000 annually” in Sweden and so we are being dishonest in putting that forward as one scenario for discussion. In fact, several parties support open borders, which would likely lead to even higher immigration levels. See for instance Centerpartiet:

<https://www.centerpartiet.se/var-politik/vara-ideer/migration-och-integration>

And as you may know, Miljöpartiet (Green Party) only agreed to limit immigration under press from Socialdemokraterna in the government in 2015, a year when immigration reached over 160,000. Besides, even at 100,000 annual immigration, we would still be on track to more than double Sweden’s population by the end of this century, with no end to growth in sight.

We disagree with you that new technologies or smarter planning can ameliorate all the negative environmental impacts of doubling or tripling Sweden’s population. We disagree that population discussions should continue to occur as if preserving flourishing populations of non-human beings were an afterthought. We disagree that the only ethically legitimate response to immigration pressures on developed countries is to work to improve conditions in sender countries. It is one thing to argue that this should be part of developed countries’ response to immigration pressures, quite another thing to argue that it should take the place of their setting limits to immigration. You imply the latter position, but do not argue for it directly.

This brings us to our fundamental disagreement. You seem to think that there is something, called “ethics” that justifies your views on immigration policy. Furthermore, that it does this so obviously that there is no need to explain how it does this to those who disagree with you. Yet you provide no specification of the ethical principles to which you are appealing and no explanation of how these principles imply particular conclusions regarding immigration policy. This despite the fact that in this case, those who disagree with you include a considerable number of your fellow citizens. But given such disagreement, you have a moral obligation to combine any ethical appeals with a clear and detailed explanation for why your favored policies

are ethically superior. Failing to provide this suggests both a lack of humility and contempt for your fellow citizens.

In our project and in thinking about these matters generally, we begin from a very different set of presuppositions. We think making good policy is hard, not easy. It includes exploring difficult empirical questions that sometimes do not have clear and unambiguous answers. It involves applying ethical principles and appealing to values that sometimes reinforce one another, but that sometimes conflict. In the case of immigration policy, it involves balancing our responsibilities as citizens of particular nations with our responsibilities as citizens of the world—a challenge that is more difficult than many people seem to believe.

Let us make this last point a little clearer. We agree with you that potential immigrants deserve to be treated fairly and humanely, no matter where they come from. But we also believe that Sweden, the U.S. and other nations have a moral responsibility to create just and ecologically sustainable societies. Since the latter responsibility cannot be met with an endlessly growing population, treating immigrants justly cannot involve letting them all in. Hard choices must be made. You may pretend that this is simply a function of your fellow citizens' lack of ethics, but this is just intellectual self-indulgence: an unwillingness to do the hard work of reasoning with your fellow citizens.

These matters are complicated and deserve further exploration. We look forward to more discussions, feel free to come back!

Regards,
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