We need a *positive demography* to adapt to low fertility, low mortality and aging

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What do people think about global and national population size?

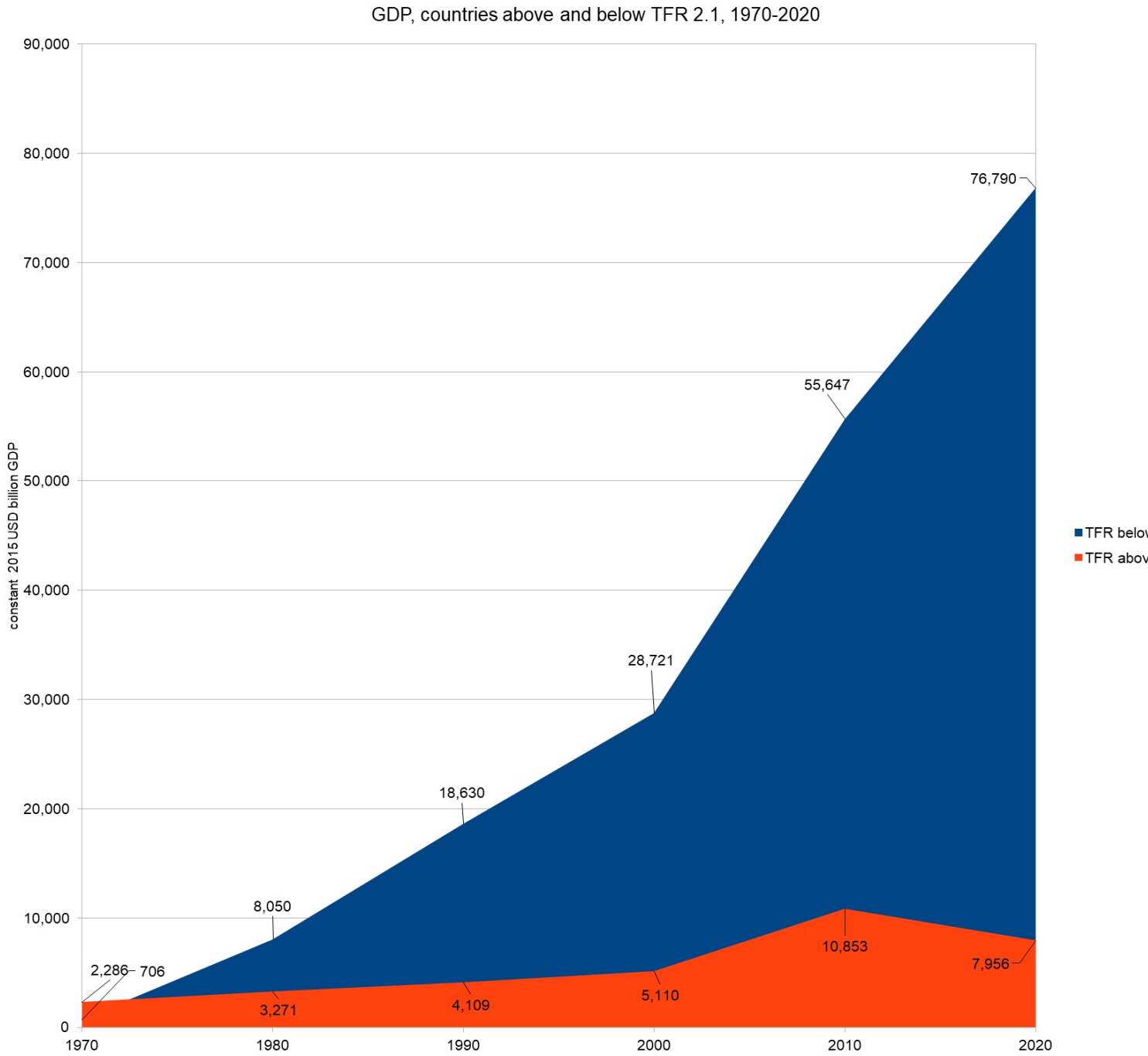
Survey evidence suggest widespread concern on population size (UNFPA 2023, CISLAC 2024):

- *Nigeria*: majority believed rapid population growth does not bring benefits (more than three times the number who thought it was beneficial)
- Percent agreeing that *population size is too high*
  - *globally:* 53% in Egypt, 63% Nigeria, 76% in Hungary, 49% in the US
  - *in own country*: India: 83%, US 37%, Japan 16%, France 26%, Egypt 56%, Brazil 50%, Nigeria: 72%
- Key reasons for fertility decline often seen as positive development – education, less unplanned fertility, less adolescent pregnancies, more gender equality

How many children do we need to sustain our cultures, economies and genes?

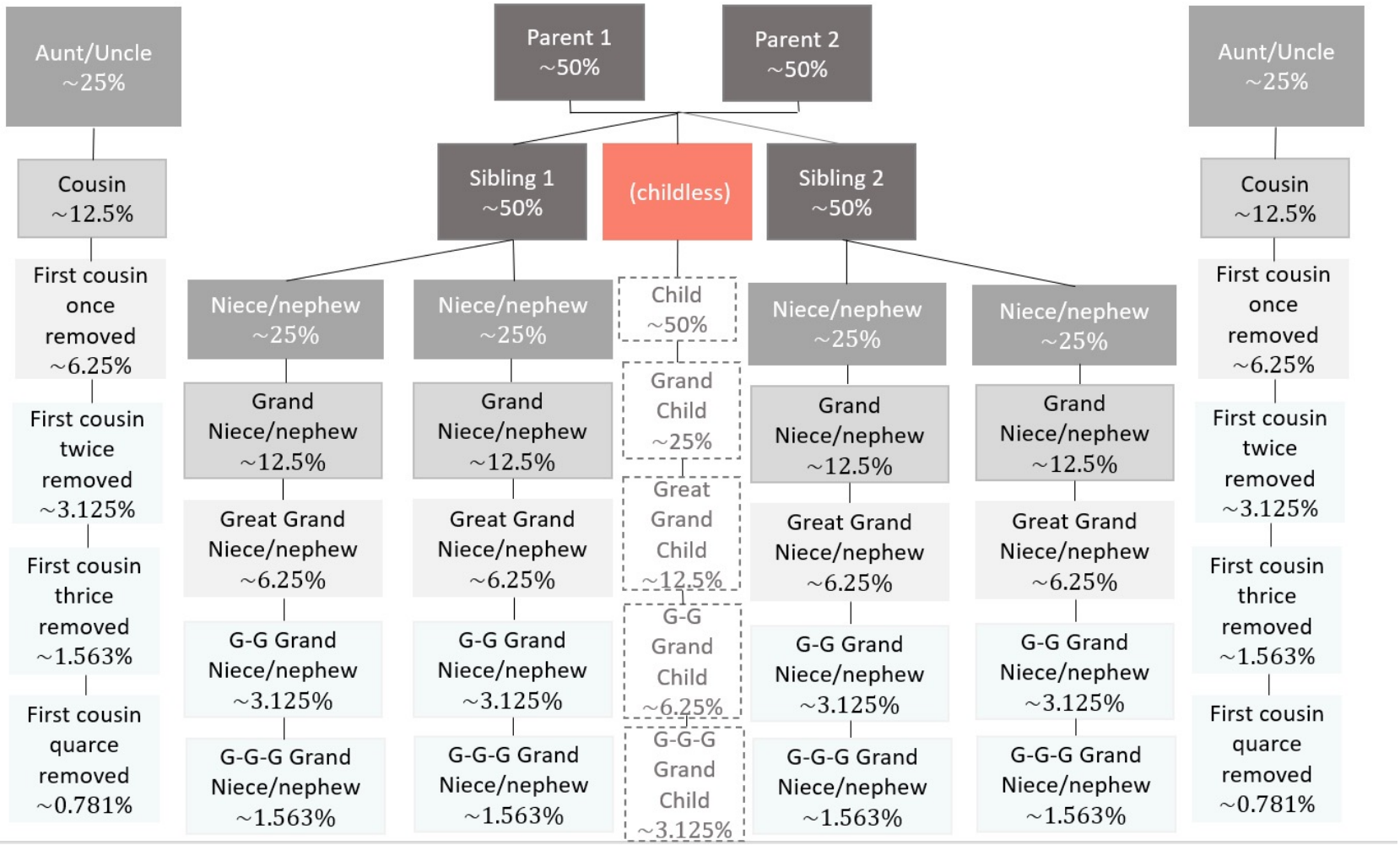
1. How many people are needed to uphold a **culture**, a belief system and way of life? A culture? Many successful cultural markers are spreading in spite of (or because of) low fertility. E.g., American, Korean, European cultures strong influence *and* low fertility
2. Job replacement: **automation** displacement potential high. One study: Among agricultural workers (now 800 million) only around 2% needed if *current* technologies implemented (Vittis et al 2022). AI increases job displacement. Low fertility nations dominate global economy
3. How many children do we need to pass on our **genes** at the population level?
   - Genetic similarity very low after 6-7 generations; few differences in genetic similiarity between childless and parents.

Almost all economic growth in below replacement fertility countries



Source: Navarro and Skirbekk 2023

Genetic consequences of own childlessness low



Skirbekk et al 2025 – The Overlooked Legacy: Genetic Contributions of the Childless, Twin Res Hum Genet

Underinvestments in skills where population growth is high.

Shares with below lowest PISA score

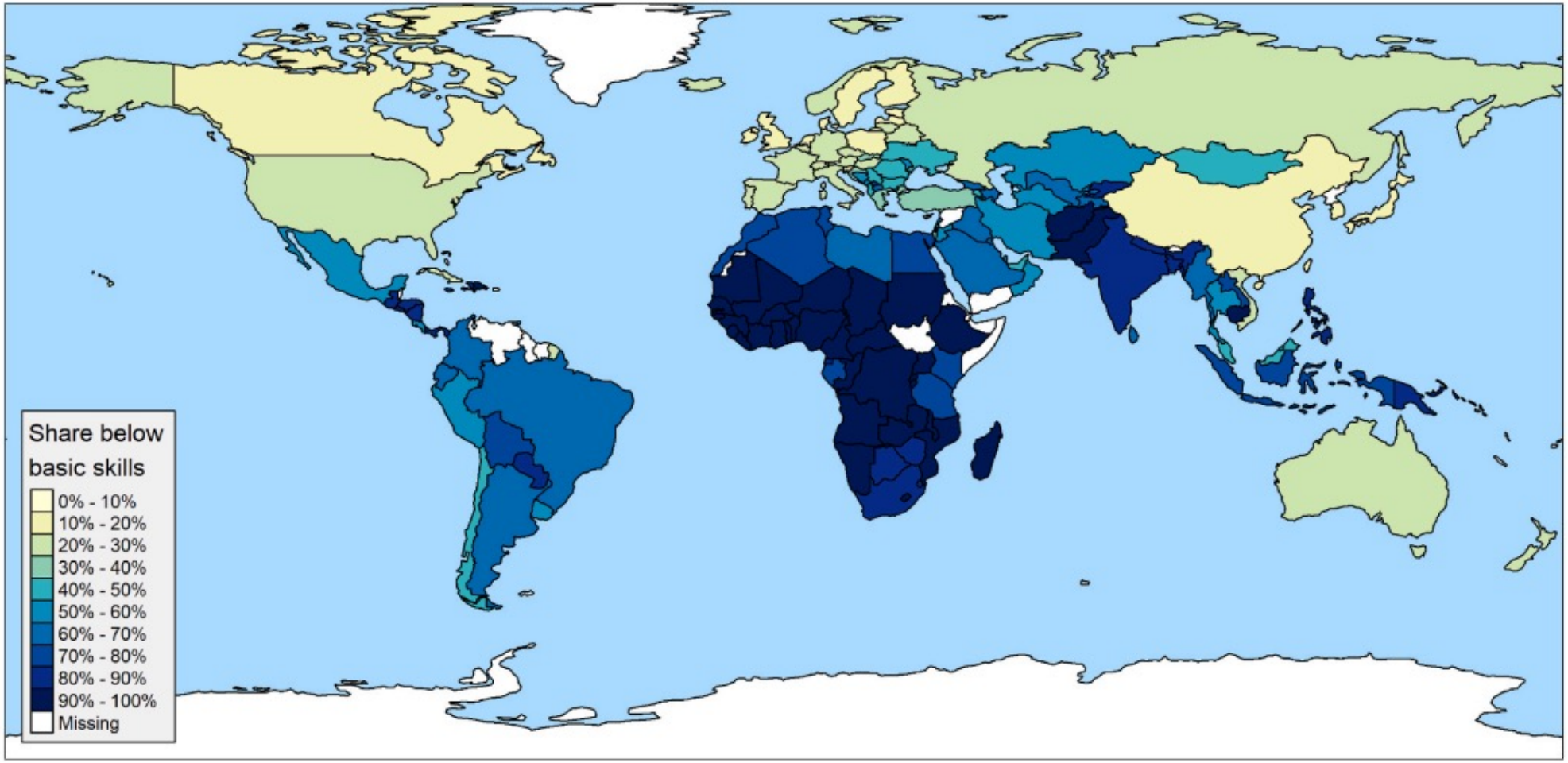
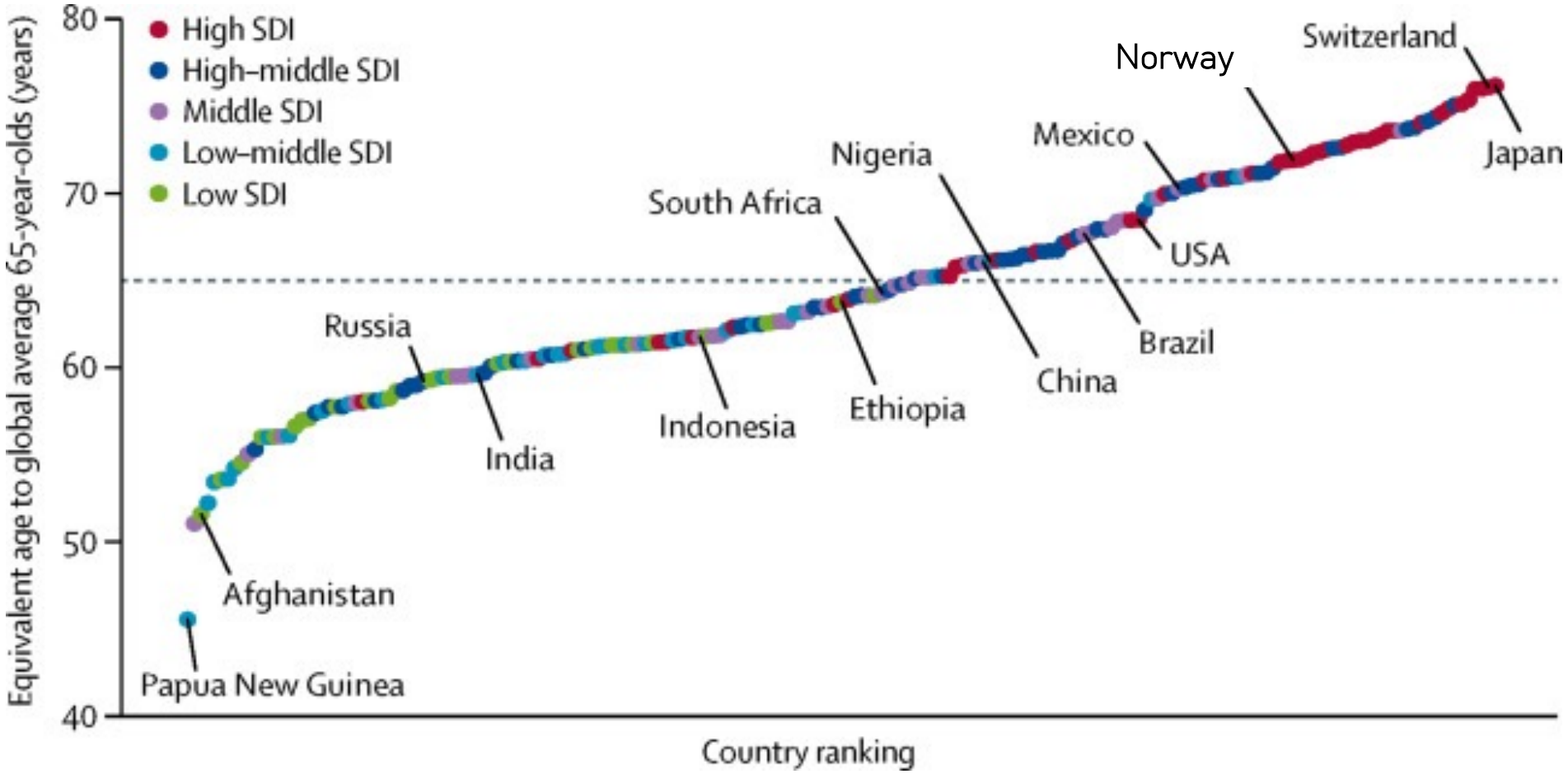


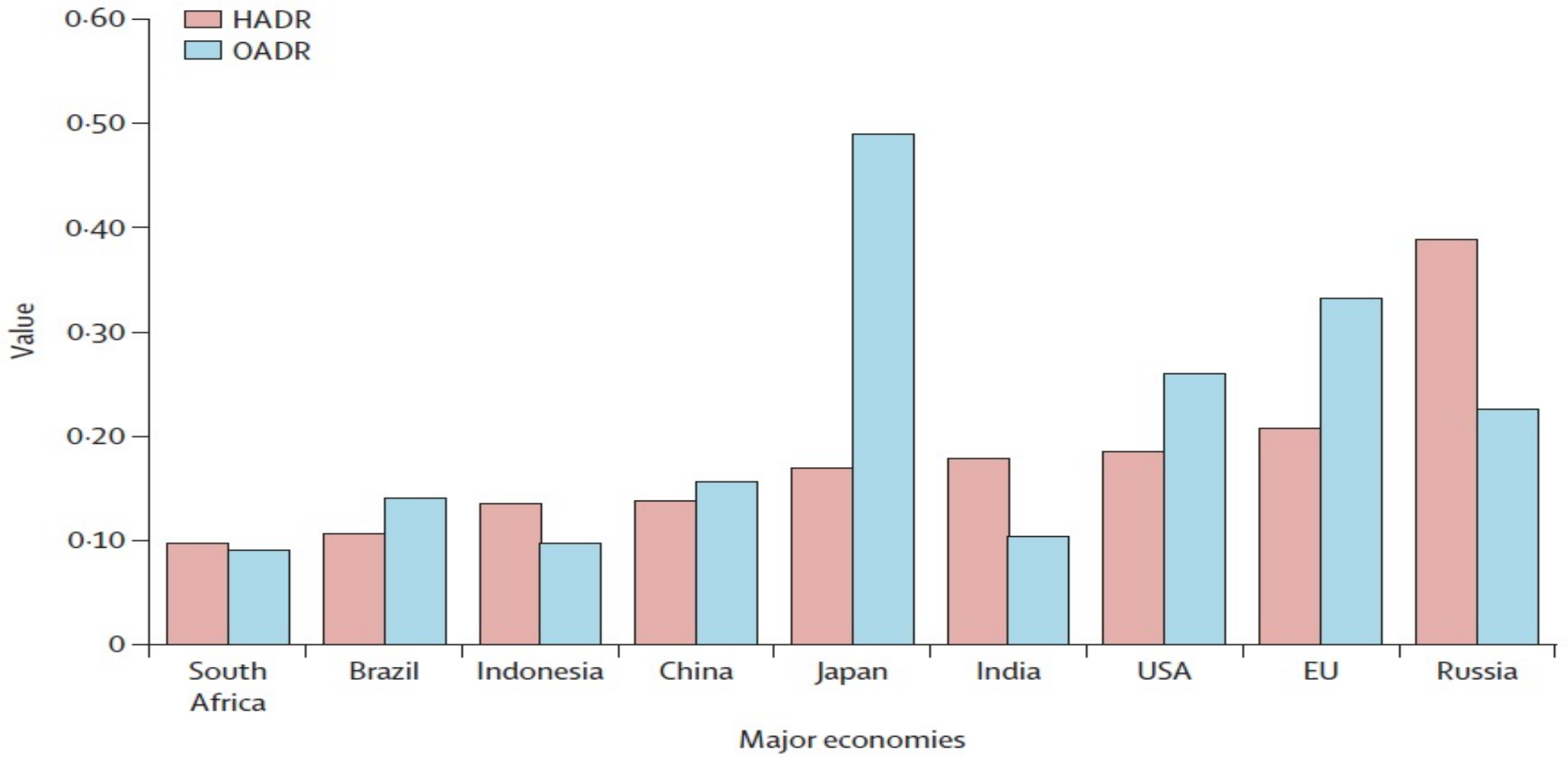
Fig. 3. World map of lack of basic skills: Share of children who do not reach basic skill levels.
Notes: Estimated share of children (incl. those currently out of school) who do not reach at least basic skill levels in math and science (equivalent to PISA Level 1). See section 3 for methodological details.

Average age national health equals global 65 year old



Chang, Skirbekk et al, Lancet Public Health 2019; Skirbekk, Dieleman et al. Lancet Healthy Longevity 2022

Health-adjusted dependency ratio (HADR) and old-age dependency ratio (OADR) for selected major economies. Higher values indicate higher ageing burden.

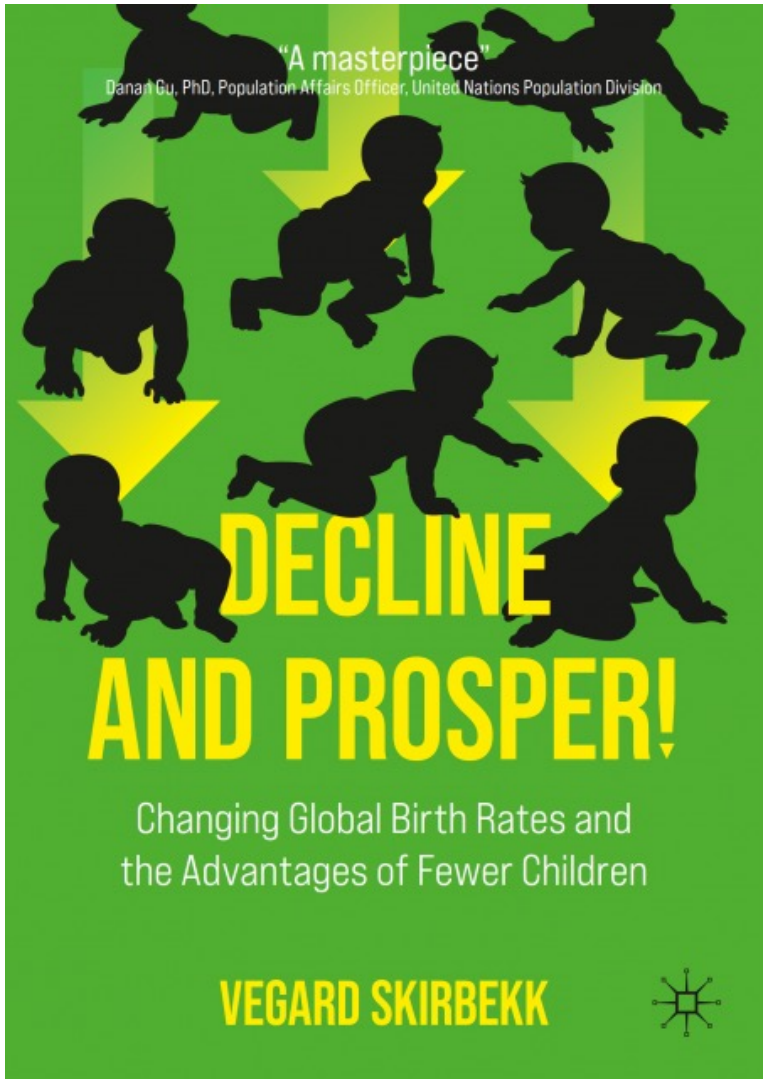


Source: Skirbekk et al. Lancet Healthy Longevity 2022

In sum

- Who ages best in terms of health and functional is the 21st century challenge
- ‘Young’ countries often worse health – functionally older
- We have weathered higher dependency ratios in the past
- It will be easier this time given better technologies
- Learn and adapt from low fertility nations to become ‘successful agers’ at country level

Fewer births inevitable. We must adapt, focus on benefits of demographic change – which will help us Decline yet Prosper!



The Economist

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Vegard Skirbekk on why we should embrace low fertility rates

"Dr. Skirbekk's prescriptions could help ameliorate [...] problems [...] throughout the developed world."

The New York Times

"This impressive book covers biology, historical fertility research, demographic transitions, individual behaviour [...] will soon become a must read for anyone interested in this topic"

-

- Melinda Mills, University of Oxford

"Goes beyond typical discussions"

-Nkechi S. Owoo, University of Ghana

"A masterpiece"

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