

Reading list

IUSSP Debate: "When Populations Shrink: Should States Encourage Births or Adapt?"

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1. Macroeconomic impacts of changes in life expectancy and fertility David Miles (2023) *The Journal of the Economics of Ageing* (Open Access) Analyzes how rising life expectancy and falling fertility affect economies. Argues that modest population decline from low fertility can improve per capita living standards and capital-labor ratios, challenging pessimistic views of ageing and depopulation. [Link](#)
2. The health-adjusted dependency ratio as a new global measure of the burden of ageing: a population-based study Vegard Skirbekk et al. (2022) *The Lancet Healthy Longevity* (Open Access) Introduces the Health-Adjusted Dependency Ratio (HADR), which accounts for actual health burdens rather than just chronological age. Shows that the traditional old-age dependency ratio often misrepresents the global burden of ageing, with important implications for policy and health expenditure.
3. Agricultural Mechanization Could Reduce Global Labour Requirements by Hundreds of Millions of Agri-Food Workers Y. Vittis, C. Godfray, and M. Obersteiner (2022) Preprint, Research Square (DOI: 10.21203/rs.3.rs-1344105/v1) Examines how widespread mechanization in agriculture could sharply reduce the global demand for farm labour, with major social and economic consequences for hundreds of millions of workers in the agri-food sector.
4. Our future in the Anthropocene biosphere Owen Gaffney and Will Steffen (2021), with related contributions *Ambio* (Open Access) Provides a systemic perspective on humanity's dominant role in Earth systems, interconnected crises (climate, biodiversity, inequality), and the urgent need for transformative biosphere stewardship and resilience-building.
5. Human Population and the Biosphere Aisha Dasgupta and Partha Dasgupta (2025) *Population and Development Review* (Open Access) Argues that population factors are too often neglected in environmental and development policy. Highlights how high fertility combined with consumption pressures in poor regions can degrade local ecosystems, perpetuate poverty, and exacerbate the population–consumption–biosphere nexus. [Link](#)
6. The Overlooked Legacy: Genetic Contributions of the Childless Vegard F. Skirbekk, Bernt Bratsberg, Christian M. Page, Dana Kristjansson (2025) *Twin Research and Human Genetics* (Open Access) Challenges stigma around childlessness by quantifying indirect genetic contributions through siblings, nieces/nephews, and extended family. Using Norwegian data, shows that childless individuals retain roughly 49% of the genetic fitness of parents via kin networks. [Link](#)
7. Special Issue on Depopulation Vienna Yearbook of Population Research 2023 (Guest-edited collection with 18+ articles and debate pieces) Covers causes, consequences, challenges, and policy responses to population decline from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including economic, social, and migration-related aspects. [Table of Contents](#) (or equivalent journal site)

8. Decline and Prosper! Changing Global Birth Rates and the Advantages of Fewer Children Vegard Skirbekk (2022) Palgrave Macmillan Comprehensive overview of declining global fertility trends, their drivers, and potential benefits. Argues that low fertility can bring advantages for welfare, women's empowerment, and the environment, while acknowledging challenges of ageing and adaptation to fewer children. [Link](#)
9. Dependency Ratios Adjusted by Health in Asia and the Pacific (Authors include JL Dieleman et al., 2025) SSRN (abstract_id=5288786) Explores the evolution of national health-adjusted dependency ratios in the Asia and Pacific region from 1990 to 2021, building on health-adjusted measures of ageing burdens. [Link](#)
10. Bringing mortality back into our understanding of fertility change: revisiting the onset of fertility transitions using net reproduction measures Vegard Skirbekk, Thomas Spoorenberg (2025). *J Pop Research* 42, 45 [Link](#)