Having Children: Is Climate Change Really a Reason Not to Have Children?

12 minute read

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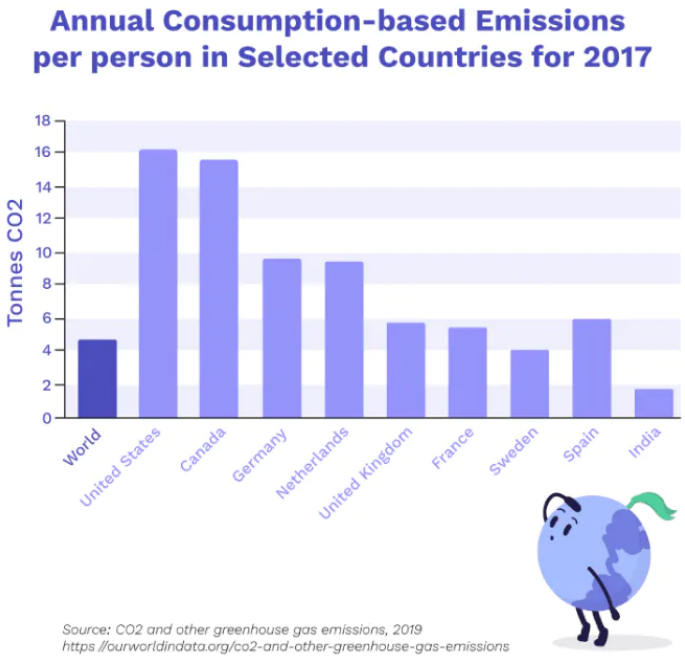
“Should I have fewer children to lower my impact on climate change?” This is a question that is often raised in the debate on how we can reduce our personal emissions.

We’ll try to answer it, focusing mainly on the people who live in high-income countries. For low-income countries, we must take a different perspective, which will be covered in our course 'A Fair World’.

On average, each person on Earth is responsible for around 5 tonnes of CO_2 emissions per year. This, however, varies greatly depending on which country the person is in. For example, in 2019, the average person in the United States emitted over 30 times more CO_2 than the average person living in Sudan.



Comparing CO_2 emissions across nations

carbon footprint by 7.8-58.6 tonnes per year over an 80-year lifespan, depending on how you measure it.

That's a lot! However, which important aspects have we not yet considered?

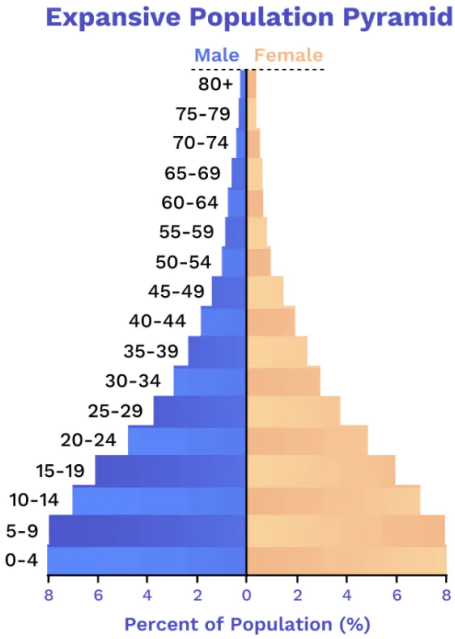
- [ ] Variation between individuals caused by different lifestyles and consumption patterns
- [ ] The positive impact of some people on emissions reduction
- [ ] Economic stability
- [ ] People's pets

Take a guess!

Remember that a person's carbon emissions are dependent on their lifestyle choices. It's possible for an individual to reduce emissions by changing their lifestyle or by working to reduce the emissions of others (through volunteering or work). As well as reducing your consumption, education and community engagement can lower your overall lifetime emissions and encourages others to do so at the same time!

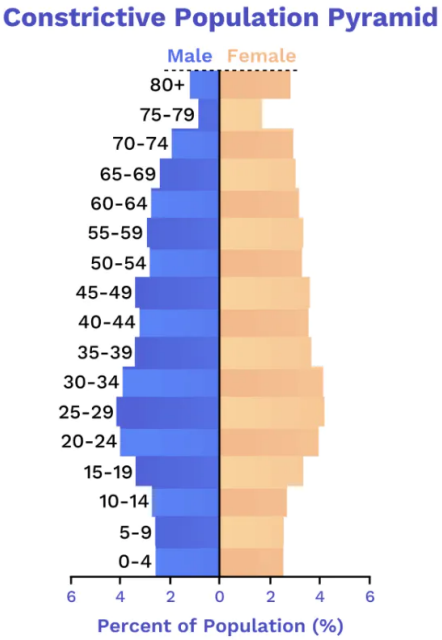
Population Pyramids: The need for children

There are benefits to having children too! The functionality of human society is highly dependent on a healthy, working population.

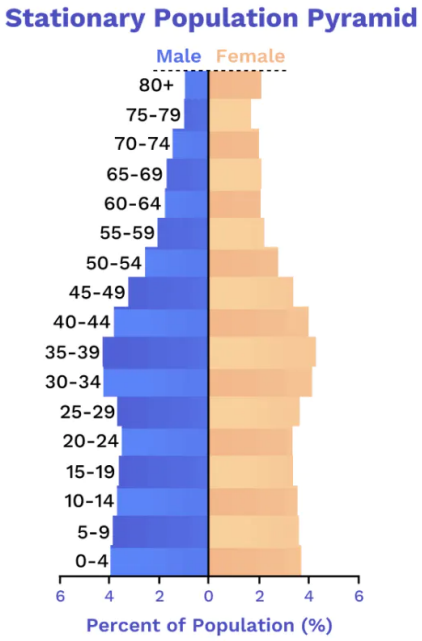


Expansive Population Pyramid

“Expansive” population pyramids are often found in developing nations. These populations often have high fertility rates and lower than average life expectancies, so their populations are growing. This is common in many Asian and African countries.



"Constructive" population pyramids are more common in countries with higher levels of social and economic development, whose populations are shrinking and ageing like in Germany. "Stationary" population pyramids describe populations that maintain a consistent size and structure over time, like the USA or Canada.



Stationary Population Pyramid

Which of the following countries have ageing populations?

- [ ] Japan
- [ ] Italy
- [ ] Argentina

Take a guess!

prominent examples such as Japan and Italy having 28 and 23 percent of their population above the age of 65, respectively.

Countries with constrictive age pyramids will likely struggle due to a shrinking workforce and an increasing cost of caring for the elderly.

Paying taxes for an ageing population

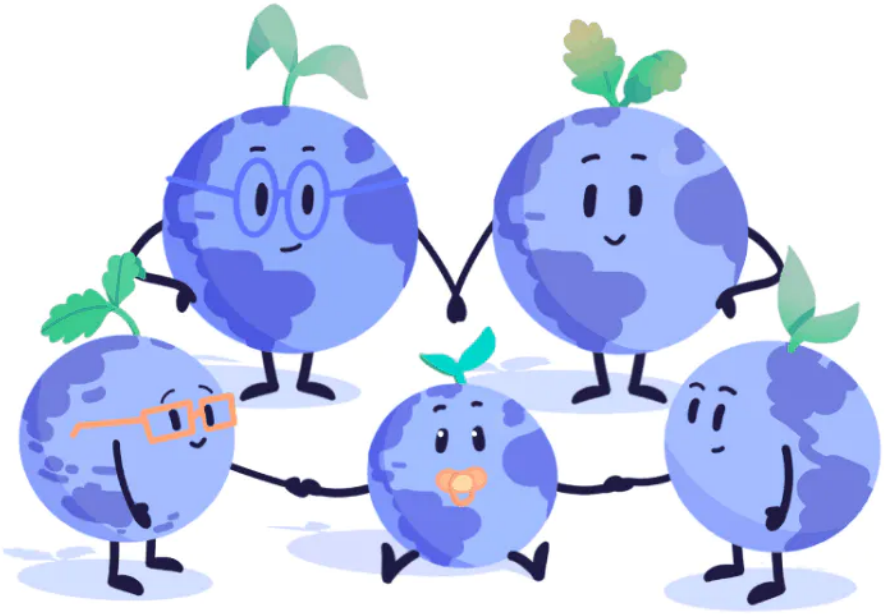
In Japan, the low birth rate has caused shifts in education, while an increasingly elderly population has forced the government to reconsider its policies regarding labor, healthcare, and taxation.

What can be done to address ageing and shrinking populations?

Well, increase the birth rate!

A key statistic to determine if a population will shrink is the total fertility rate (TFR): the average number of children per woman in her lifetime.

For a population to remain constant, a TFR of around 2.1 is needed. However, some countries have a TFR of only 0.98. How can these countries implement policies to increase this number?



Earthly's family

Policies used in other countries include maternity/paternity leave, family allowances, and subsidized child care.

But is it ethical to have children in the age of climate change? Some argue that having children would be unethical as it would increase the amount of people contributing to climate change and expose future generations to climate-related risks.

Children are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, especially children in developing countries. Climate change may incur physical harm due to high temperatures, natural disasters, and decreased availability of nutritious food. Climate change may also cause mental and psychological distress, as well as decreased availability of education for some children.

Child Earthly is sad

However, policy changes and community engagement can lower children's climate-related risks. Educating children and encouraging their participation in climate discussions can help promote sustainable development and curb individual emissions. Thus, while having children does come with risks, these risks can be lowered through lifestyle choices and policy.

Conclusion

Having fewer children does reduce your carbon emissions, but some countries may face significant problems if their populations continue to age and shrink.

With policy changes and innovation, the impact of each person on the environment will be lower in the future than it is today. We must advocate for policies that can lower our lifetime emissions and make lifestyle changes that are more sustainable.

If you choose to have children, empower them to discuss and work on solutions to climate change. Together you can help construct a more positive future for everyone!

Earthly and their child planting together

What did you think of this chapter?


Not good


Okay


Good


Awesome

Give Feedback

Next Chapter