



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



WORLD POPULATION DAY 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

WEBINAR ON THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FERTILITY

NEW YORK, 14 JULY 2021, 9.00 – 9.45 AM EDT

Background

To mark World Population Day 2021, UN DESA's Population Division and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are organizing an online panel discussion of leading population experts to discuss the impact of the pandemic on fertility preferences and behaviours as well as on the availability and use of family planning, teenage marriage, data collection and more.

Global fertility had been declining during the past half century, from 4.5 live births per woman to 2.5 births during 1970-1975 and 2015-2020, respectively. In 2019, nearly half of the world population were living in countries with fertility below replacement level (2.1 live births per woman). Meanwhile, 40 countries still reported total fertility rates higher than 4.0 births per woman, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, and in the low-income and the least developed countries (LDCs) groups of countries more generally. Nonetheless, it was projected that the global fertility decline would continue and may reach replacement level shortly after the mid-century.

Since late 2019, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has created a global public health crisis, causing worldwide economic slowdowns and massive social disruptions. While the impact of the pandemic on morbidity, mortality and migration has been relatively well documented, its impact on sexual and reproductive health, including fertility, require a longer period of time to manifest, and is therefore only beginning to become evident. In addition, the disruption in data collection in many countries also has affected the timely assessment of the impact of the pandemic on access to sexual and reproductive health services and on fertility levels and trends.

Historical experience from past pandemics/epidemics and economic crises helps to develop an understanding of the possible impact of such a global pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive behaviour, including the timing of the birth of a child and/or desired number of children a couple will have. There are no one-size-fits-all explanations, since the impact of the current pandemic depends on a wide range of factors. First, countries have been hit by the pandemic at different points of time by various waves with differential intensity and duration. Second, countries at different stages of the demographic transition with various pre-pandemic fertility levels and trends are likely have differing post-pandemic fertility outcomes.



Third, countries vary in their policy responses to the pandemic, timing and extent of lockdowns, and on the ensuing disruptions to SRH services and contraceptive supply chains. Last but not the least, countries with different socioeconomic development levels also differ in crisis response and recovery.

Programme

To shed more light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive behaviour, the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are organizing a live-streamed panel discussion with leading population experts as well as with practitioners in the field. The discussions will build on the findings from an expert group meeting on this topic convened by the Population Division on 10 and 11 May 2021.¹ Throughout the webinar, the audience can ask questions to the panelists using the chat function.

Moderator

- **Mr. Raj Kumar**, Founding President and Editor-in-Chief of [Devex](#)

A. Opening and welcome (3 minutes)

- **Ms. Diene Keita**, Deputy Executive Director for Programme, UNFPA

B. Panel discussion (30 minutes)

- Panelists

- **Dr. Deda Ogum Alangea**, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, University of Ghana
- **Ms. Suzana Cavenaghi**, Independent researcher, Brazil
- **Mr. Gu Baochang**, Senior Research Associate, Center for Population and Development Policy Studies, Fudan University, China
- **Ms. Letizia Mencarini**, Professor of Demography, Bocconi University, Italy
- **Dr. Walter Mendoza**, Population and Development Analyst, UNFPA, Peru
- **Mr. Krystof Zeman**, Research Scientist, Vienna Institute of Demography, Austria

¹ For details, please see: www.un.org/development/desa/pd/event/egm-impact-covid-19-fertility



- Proposed questions

- What are the key factors and theoretical considerations that we need to bear in mind in assessing the fertility impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the key mechanisms through which the COVID-19 pandemic affects fertility preferences and behaviours? Can we draw on lessons from previous pandemics/ epidemics and economic crises?
- What do the initial data tell us about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fertility?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the use of family planning? How has it affected teenage marriage, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, adolescent fertility and overall fertility?
- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected data collection in many countries. To what extent does this affect the assessment of its impact on fertility and other sexual and reproductive health determinants?

C. Final round of comments from panelists (10 minutes)

- What are the likely scenarios of global or regional fertility in the short and medium term? Over a longer term (more than 10 years), what impacts can we expect the COVID-19 pandemic on fertility?
- Looking ahead, how can we turn this crisis into opportunities for women and couples but also for young people, particularly young girls? Do we have some examples of good practices?

D. Closing remarks (5 minutes)

- **Mr. John Wilmoth**, Director, Population Division, UN DESA, New York
- **Ms. Rachel Snow**, Chief, Population and Development Branch, UNFPA, New York

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