

## Demographer Dyson in demand ahead of World Population Day



**Tim Dyson, Professor in Population and Development, has become a popular frame of reference recently ahead of World Population Day, which fell on Saturday 11 July.**

The global population, which stood at about one billion by the year 1800, has been rising exponentially. Rapid growth in the last century means that more than seven billion people now occupy the Earth.

Thanks to advances in food production and health care, human population growth has taken on a “hockey stick-like trajectory” to the 21<sup>st</sup> century – an analogy made infamous by Michael E. Mann’s *The Hockey Stick and The Climate Wars*, first published in 1999.

This demographic trend – which raises serious concerns about access to food, clean water, sanitation and adequate shelter – became the focus of the 2015 **World Population Day**.

Commemorating this, the Guardian Teacher Network chose to highlight **an interactive resource** featuring LSE’s Tim Dyson alongside Oxford’s Prof. David Coleman as a means of engaging young people with some of the major challenges involved with a swelling global population.

The network describes it as “a journey from the Neolithic revolution to the first rubber condom”, exploring how the world and its population has changed.

### Fertility, Suffrage, and the Past

This is not to say that the exponential rate of growth can be explained simply by fertility rates, which (as understood by the UN World Population Prospects glossary) have been in decline.

**Schuyler Null**, editor for the Wilson Center’s Environmental Change and Security Program, has drawn upon Tim’s 2013 work, **‘On the Democratic and Demographic Transitions’**, to discuss some of the reasons for this.

Alongside improved health care, which has improved survival rates for children and made it easier for couples to access conception, suffrage movements began the long process of liberating women (in Tim's words) "from lives previously dominated by childbirth and childcare".

Total fertility rates declined first in Europe, followed by the Americas and Asia, Null states. Africa has followed later and more slowly, and thus its future demographic trajectory is the **source of much debate**.

## So, what's the future?

Is the rapid growth in global population over the last 200 years here to stay?

Not according to the UN Population Division, the broadly accepted standard for demographic projections.

Among the challenges faced by the UNPD is that of making predictions for regions where demographic trends don't follow historical norms, such as sub-Saharan Africa, where fertility rates remain higher and less predictable than elsewhere.

The UNDP predicts a high probability that global population will increase by **2.5 to 5 billion in the next hundred years**, and then begin to level off as contraception use growth grows and mortality rates fall.

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*In April, Tim Dyson addressed the UN Commission on how access to birth control could improve health and urban growth issues in the world's least demographically developed countries.*

*[Find out more here.](#)*

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