

**Population science working hand-in-hand with
humanitarian workers?**

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By 2050 the world population will have grown by 2.5 billion and the proportion of those aged over 60 years will have doubled from about 11% to 22%. The absolute number of people aged 60 and above is expected to increase from 605 million to 2 billion. There will be a sharp increase in displacements due to climate change. By 2050, if no measures are taken, there will be more than 143 million climate migrants in sub-Saharan Africa (86 million), South Asia (40 million) and Latin America (17 million). Today, one in three urban dwellers lives in an informal area and, according to the United Nations, about 180,000 people migrate to cities every day. In Africa and Asia, the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030, and 50% of Africa's population will be living in an urban environment by 2050 (compared with 38% today).

Certain demographic phenomena, such as the ageing of the world population, both in the north and in the south, migration, urbanisation, population growth and increased poverty, have become visibly strong trends and are developing at a surprisingly fast rate. They are generating new needs and there is an increasingly large gap between initial forecasts and the resources intended to address them – and all stakeholders are becoming obliged to adapt accordingly.

This issue of *Humanitarian Alternatives* reviews today's major demographic trends and considers what demography can teach us about the current and future challenges facing humanitarian aid operators. How can demography – the statistical study of human populations – give us a clearer understanding, a different perspective on humanitarian issues and actions, and improve our approach to them?

Furthermore, dubious data, farfetched demographic projections or the communication of statistics that have been skewed to suit political agendas can cause fear and help to cultivate clichés and false representations of certain populations or phenomena, making the humanitarian assistance intended for them more difficult to deliver. We need to deconstruct the kind of alarming statistics that trigger these reactions so that we can distinguish cataclysmic predictions (“massive influx of migrants”, “population explosion”, etc.) from forecasts that are of real use in preparing future humanitarian actions. This latest issue helps by highlighting what is true and what is false.

Finally, as some humanitarian actors now use demographic research tools to gather, process and analyse data on the socio-demographic characteristics of their beneficiaries, we wanted to involve them in this issue to give them the opportunity to explain their reasons and methods of use of these tools. Yet it was mainly academics and researchers who responded to us, thus demonstrating that while NGOs are still far from acting as demographers, they would be well advised to take this “measure of the multitude” seriously.

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