

Demographic Futures: Current Challenges & Moving Toward Solutions

Summary Brief: High-level Ministerial Roundtable at ICFP 2025

Event Overview

On November 5, 2025, the William H. Gates Sr. Institute (WHGI), FP2030, and UNFPA convened a High-level Ministerial Roundtable in Bogotá, Colombia at the International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP). The session brought together representatives from global governments, donors, multilateral partners, and others to discuss how demographic research and evidence can shape and inform health and economic policy. Event materials can be accessed [here](#).

Purpose and Objectives

The current discourse around low fertility and population decline, coupled with cuts to global family planning funding, is posing a real threat to sexual and reproductive health and rights worldwide. The event sought to advance a shared understanding of Demographic Futures to move from framing demographic changes as challenges into opportunities for human-centered development. Specifically, conversations and presentations centered around 3 objectives:

- 1. Defining the Discourse:** Separating fearful narratives of growth or decline from reality by using demographic intelligence;
- 2. Data for Development:** Emphasizing that high-quality granular demographic data is essential for planning, infrastructure, health policy, and monitoring global goals;
- 3. Centering Autonomy:** Reaffirming that individual agency, human rights, and reproductive choice are the foundational principles of a resilient population policy.

Key Takeaways

Scene Setting: Past Trends and Future Trajectories

- **Diverse Trajectories:** Global population is expected to peak at 10.3 billion in the mid-2080s but growth is not uniform. About 28% live in "post-transition" countries where populations have already peaked, 10% live in countries that are expected to peak between 2025 and 2054, and 62% live in countries still growing through 2054.
- **Aging:** Life expectancy reached 73.3 years in 2024 globally. The population over 65 is the fastest-growing age group globally, not only in the Global North, and expected to continue. For example, the share of older persons in India alone is expected to double from 10-12% in 2025 to 20% in 2050.
- **Fertility Drivers:** Global fertility was 2.27 in 2024, with more than half the world's countries now below replacement level. Key drivers include increased female education, economic constraints, and the gender-equity conflict.

- **Low-Fertility Strategies:** Recent experience has shown that a focus on incentivizing higher birth rates has been misguided and unsuccessful. Effective long-term strategies must focus on policies that promote human capital formation across the life-course, policy and programmatic support to child-care and healthy aging, and gender inequities in the care economy
- **Global Data Emergency:** The global population data landscape is on the brink of crisis – the 2020 census round failed to enumerate approximately 30% of the world’s population, international household survey programs (such as the demographic and health surveys) lack sustainable financing and governance, and administrative data systems (such as CRVS and health information systems) were shown to lack fitness for purpose during the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation undermines the evidence base for demographic futures shaped by rights-based policy, data and evidence.

Regional Panel: Diverse Demographic Realities

Context	Country	Strategic Innovation
High Fertility	Pakistan	Fiscal Reform: Proposed reducing population weightage in the inter-governmental fiscal transfer formula from 85% to 50% to remove "pro-growth" incentives.
	Mali	Integrated Access: Scaling family planning access and sustainability by integrating services with national immunization programs across 1,675 community health centers.
Replacement Level Fertility	India	Behavioral Shift: Repositioning family planning as a "Healthy Family" program, utilizing ASHA workers to reach a 99% awareness rate in underserved areas.
	Bangladesh	Youth-Centric Tech: Leveraging digital apps for garment workers and female-led "orange flower" pharmacies to bypass traditional clinical barriers to family planning access for young people.
Low Fertility	Brazil	Reconciliation Policy: Expanding paternity leave to 30 days to dismantle the structural gender inequalities in the care economy.
	Colombia	Human Capital: Reframing aging policies to ensure population decline results in higher per capita investment in youth rather than reduced services.

Ministerial and Participant-Identified Calls to Action

Institutional & Structural Realignment

- **Adopt a Whole-of-Government Approach:** Participants emphasized that population issues must be elevated to the highest levels of leadership, specifically under the Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Finance, to ensure that demographic changes inform education, labor, and economic policy, rather than being siloed in the health sector.
- **Transition to Program-Based Budgeting:** Move away from sector-based funding models toward integrated program-based approaches where different agencies collaborate toward shared demographic goals, modeled on successful initiatives in Uganda.
- **Align Population and Health Functions:** Encourage the integration of health and population ministries to reduce institutional fragmentation and streamline the delivery of reproductive health services.

Advancing Demographic Intelligence & Data Use

- **Prioritize Data-Driven Programming:** Establish localized data collection systems to ensure that family planning programs are culturally resonant and based on real-time evidence.
- **Utilize Predictive Modeling:** Shift from descriptive data to predictive "intelligence" that allows governments to anticipate demographic shifts (such as rapid aging or youth bulges).
- **Access to Evidence-Based Policies:** Commit to translating scientific knowledge into actionable public policies that improve human development and resilience.

Redefining Success Metrics & Narrative

- **Move Beyond Numerical Targets:** Delegates called for a shift away from traditional metrics like the 2.1 replacement level TFR. New success measures should be framed around human rights norms and focus on individual satisfaction, happiness, and the realization of bodily autonomy.
- **Safeguard Rights Against Pro-Natalist Pressures:** In low-fertility contexts, governments must proactively ensure that reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy are not compromised by political or economic pressure to increase population numbers or address changing age structures.

Target Group Interventions & Social Norms

- **Early Engagement of Boys and Men:** Standardize the inclusion of boys in sexual and reproductive health education from a young age to dismantle restrictive gender norms and foster shared responsibility.

Target Group Interventions & Social Norms, *continued*

- **Expand Digital and Community Access for Youth:** Scale digital innovations, such as apps for garment workers and youth-specific health corners, to reach adolescents where they live and work.
- **Empower Women's Leadership:** Focus on the economic and social empowerment of women—such as providing electric bikes for mobility or expanding paternity leave—to ensure that family planning leads to broader social equity.

Financial & Policy Resilience

- **Reform Fiscal Sharing Formulas:** Explore changing inter-governmental fiscal transfer formulas to reduce the "weightage" of raw population numbers, thereby removing incentives for high growth and prioritizing quality-of-life outcomes.
- **Protect Domestic Funding:** Develop legal and policy safeguards to protect family planning budgets from political shifts or the withdrawal of international donor support.
- **Invest in Human Capital Pathways:** Ensure that education and vocational training are aligned with demographic projections to help countries realize the demographic dividend.

Conclusion

Demographic futures are not destiny; they are shaped by policy choices grounded in evidence, equity, and human rights. Family planning serves as the essential catalyst, bridging the gap between individual reproductive autonomy and collective national development. By aligning demographic intelligence with social justice, nations can ensure that population transitions—whether of growth or decline—become opportunities for inclusive progress and dignity.



Group photo from the meeting