22nd June 2022

**Submission by Population Matters in response to the call for input by the**

**UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights**

**in the context of climate change**

**‘’Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of mitigation, adaptation, and financial actions to address climate change, with particular emphasis on loss and damage’’**

Population Matters is a UK-based charity campaigning to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people’s lives. We promote positive, practical, ethical solutions – encouraging smaller families, inspiring people to reduce excessive consumption and helping us all to live within our planet’s natural limits. We believe everyone should have the freedom and ability to choose a smaller family. We support human rights, women’s and girls’ empowerment, and global justice.

**5. What international, regional and national policies and legal approaches are necessary to protect current and future generations and achieve intergenerational justice, particularly for individuals and communities, from the adverse impacts of climate change?**

Governments and international bodies must support and fund ethical population solutions, including the provision of voluntary, modern family planning and girls’ education, to help mitigate climate change, and to give individuals and communities, now and in the future, the ability to protect themselves better from the adverse impacts of climate change. These solutions will also improve the human rights of individuals, especially women and girls.

Authoritative scientific reports and studies in recent years have directly acknowledged the role of population growth in fuelling climate change. For example, a 2018 Special Report on global warming by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identified potential future high population growth as a “*key impediment*” to hitting the critical target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels[[1]](#endnote-1), while its most optimistic pathway modelled a population of 7 billion by 2100 – far below the current UN projection. This was followed by the IPCC’s 2022 report on climate change mitigation, which stated that “*globally,* *GDP per capita and population growth remained the* *strongest drivers of CO2 emissions from fossil fuel* *combustion in the last decade*”.[[2]](#endnote-2)

In 2020, the value of population action to address climate change was quantified by the world-leading study of climate change solutions, Project Drawdown. Drawdown analysed 82 available practical policy options for minimising emissions, ranging from plant-based diets to refrigerant management. It concluded that empowering voluntary actions (especially reproductive rights and education) to bend population growth to a lower scenario based on UN projections would save 85 gigatonnes of emissions by 2050, making them the second most effective solution in limiting warming to 2°C, and the fifth most effective in limiting warming to 1.5°C, by 2100. This makes these ethical population actions a more effective climate solution in the 2°C scenario than all popular technological solutions, including solar, onshore and offshore wind, wave and tidal power, and electric cars.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Mechanisms to secure lower fertility and sustainable populations through voluntary means

are positive and effective. Most are already explicitly featured in the Sustainable Development Goals:

* End poverty and reduce inequality – **SDGs 1 and 10**
* Provide universal access to high quality education – **SDG 4**
* Women’s empowerment – **SDG 5**
* Access to and uptake of modern family planning – **SDGs 3 and 5**

The provision of equal and unhindered access to modern family planning and good quality education, which empowers women and girls to make choices about their bodies and lives, as well as helping to lift families and entire communities out of poverty, benefits everyone, everywhere.

In addition, these ethical actions also play a vital role in equipping women and girls, and in

turn their communities, to adapt to and build resilience against inevitable climate impacts.[[4]](#endnote-4) [[5]](#endnote-5) That essential, long-term climate change mitigation benefits also arise reinforces the central importance of redoubling our efforts to achieve them.

See Populations Matters’ briefing, [*The Climate Crisis: Why Population Matters*](https://populationmatters.org/resources/climate-crisis-why-population-matters), for more information.

**8. What actions are necessary to enhance actions by States, business enterprises, civil society and intergovernmental organisations to increase efforts to ensure that actions to adapt to the impacts of climate change contribute to reducing, and not exacerbating, the vulnerabilities of individuals and communities in vulnerable situations to the adverse impacts of climate change?**

The UN must continue to push for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by States and others. As stated in answer to question 5, these contain the ethical solutions that are a win-win for people and planet. Women’s empowerment, education and access to modern family planning improve the human rights of individuals, especially women and girls, and reduce their vulnerabilities to the adverse impacts of climate change by helping to enhance their ability to adapt to and build resilience against those impacts.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

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1. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018) Special Report: Global Warming

   of 1.5 ºC, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) AR6 Climate Change 2022:

   Mitigation of Climate Change, <https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FinalDraft_FullReport.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Project Drawdown (2020), Table of Solutions, <https://drawdown.org/solutions/table-ofsolutions> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Andrijevic, M., Crespo Cuaresma, J., Lissner, T. et al. (2020) Overcoming gender inequality

   for climate resilient development, Nature Communications 11, 6261. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-19856-w> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Project Drawdown (2021) Girls’ Education and Family Planning: Essential Components of

   Climate Adaptation and Resilience, <https://www.drawdown.org/publications/drawdownlift-policy-brief-girls-education-and-family-planning> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)