

POLICY

Population

Living within our limits

The population of the UK consumes more resources than the land can produce renewably. It supports this way of life by using more than its fair share of global resources – often to the detriment of the people and the environment in producing areas – and drawing heavily on non-renewables.

A measure of the impact of a population is its ecological footprint. The ecological footprint of the UK extends beyond its borders and this is not sustainable.

Resource depletion; loss of wild animal and plant life; pollution; inflated house and land prices; social stress; traffic congestion; factory farming are all signs that the UK environment is under stress.

The Green Party is the only party that recognises the need for a long-term strategy to steadily reduce the UK ecological footprint and achieve sustainability for the good of future generations, other species and our environment.

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This population policy will:

- Require the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to monitor the ecological impact of the UK population.
- Promote informed debate on a sustainable population for the UK, taking into account levels of consumption.
- Provide free family planning, readily available in all localities, funded from a separate budget within the NHS.
- Reinforce sex education in schools to remove ignorance in all areas of sexual health.
- Ensure that women have economic, social and political equality with men.

Isn't the UK population falling?

The Office of National Statistics figures show that births still outnumber deaths in the UK.

Don't we need more workers to support our growing number of elderly?

Changing birth rates and greater life expectancy do alter the age balance of the population. On the other hand, living longer goes with staying healthy longer. There is a reserve of unused labour in unemployment and under-employment. Many people are employed unproductively. All these factors will need balancing. The Population Policy must be understood as part of a package of strategies for a sustainable society.

Isn't this just a Third World problem?

One in a 100 of all people on Earth live in the UK and the population density of England is higher than almost any other country in the world. Our high levels of consumption mean that our impact on the planet is enormous. It would take a land area more than twice that of Britain to produce all our food and raw materials and to absorb our waste and pollution. We must address this question ourselves before we can tell other countries how to behave.

Isn't the problem about consumption, not population?

Although a less-consuming lifestyle and the development of renewable technologies will reduce the ecological footprint, a stable or slowly reducing population is also necessary to achieve a sustainable and equitable society.

Wouldn't the answer be to restrict immigration?

Blaming immigration misses the point. There are unfilled jobs on offer because the UK pursues a rate of economic growth that cannot be sustained by the work of people already living here. Foreign workers come to take those jobs because their own economies have been exploited by the policies of wealthier countries – such as ours. However, our economy should not be one that is dependent on inward migration, as this results in more overcrowding, qualified workers being poached from poorer countries, and exploited labour in the grey economy. We need a national economy that works within environmental limits – including a stable population – with less growth overall, together with an international economy which does not force people to leave their homes in order to provide a decent living for themselves and their families.

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1a Waterlow Road, London. N19 5NJ. Telephone: 020 7272 4474

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