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# A World of 8 Billion: Towards a Resilient Future, Harnessing Opportunities and Ensuring Rights and Choices for All

## SUMMARY

- The world's population is projected to reach 8 billion on 15 November 2022.
- The best way to ensure demographic resilience is to support human rights, including individuals' reproductive rights and choices.
- Sound family policy needs to be introduced to address the possibility that in time, fertility could fall to the problematically low levels.

The world's population is expected to reach 8 billion in November this year, another incredible milestone worth celebration in the long history of human civilization. Accordingly, the world's today has succeeded in reducing the amount of poverty thanks to a remarkable progress in health care services around the globe. In Malaysia, healthcare advancement has resulted the infant mortality and the maternal mortality rate to decreased dramatically. Hence, prolong population life expectancy with more people equally have chance to live longer and healthier.

## MALAYSIA DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENT

Malaysia has a population of 32.4 million in 2020, moving up from 27.5 million in 2010. Despite the increase, the country recorded a slower average annual population growth of 1.7 percent during 2010-2020, lower than 2.1 percent recorded between 2000-2010. While the population of the country increasing each year, there is a grave concern that the world is in the midst of cascading

and multiplying crises post COVID-19 pandemic. Slower economic recovery, rising cost-of-living, food security crises caused by Russia-Ukraine conflict, increasing inflationary pressure and disastrous climate distress are a clear sign of warning of darkening global outlook the world is facing. This momentous challenges of global magnitude amid rapid demographic changes require Malaysia to take effective holistic measures and responses to build demographic resilience.

## HARNESSING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

Currently, Malaysia has the most important potential to be utilized in driving the country's forward, the productive age group. According to the 2020 Malaysian Population and Housing Census, the current age structure of the country's population has recorded an increase in the 'working population' age group (15-64 years) with 69.3 percent in 2020, compared to 67.3 percent in 2010. In addition to that, 2020 Census also found that the total dependent ratio has decreased from 48.5 in 2010 to 44.3 in 2020. The increase in 'economically active' age group alongside declining in dependency ratio has offers a "window of opportunity" for the country to seize.

The government hence should reap this momentary opportunity by increasing the per capita income of the population through the provision of job opportunities characterized by an efficient matching and comprehensive labour market condition. As people realise they will live longer, today's working population will certainly accumulate greater savings in order to secure a sound financial security for their old age and become self-reliant from government assistance.

## ENSURING RIGHTS AND CHOICES FOR ALL

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the importance of awareness about the health and rights of woman. In this context, making people aware of the importance of family planning, maternal healthcare, and human rights is an important step.

Therefore, to ensure demographic resilience, Malaysia through Ministry of Health provides comprehensive health care services for all age groups and gender, including the provision of contraceptive and sexual reproductive health which are accessible in the primary health-care facilities nationwide. The advancement of infertility treatment has long been an achievement as every human being has a right to enjoy the highest attainable state of health. Addressing infertility is therefore an important part of realizing the right of individuals and couples to found a family.

**Malaysia has the most important potential to be utilized in driving the country's forward, the productive age group.**

Gender equality in Malaysia has much been improved. Today, the task of consolidating and streamlining the efforts made by various ministries and agencies to eliminate discrimination against women is actively seen by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. This is to promote the inclusion of women in the implementation of the Malaysia Plan with a view to ensure that gender equality and female empowerment were incorporated into national development planning.

## COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY POLICY

Over the past three decades, the issue of declining fertility rates has become a global issue, especially among developed and developing countries. While Malaysia on track towards becoming a high income and developed country, the unstoppable decline in fertility is a cause for concern.

Sound family initiatives need to be introduced to address the possibility that in time, fertility could fall to the problematically low levels reached in many East Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore), which all experiencing problems of contraction in workforce and rapid population ageing.

Given the reality, it is more important than ever to strengthen the "family-friendly policies" in Malaysia. By focusing on the work-life balance, various aspects should be seriously look into such as the provision of widespread access to affordable childcare, addressing the needs for affordable and high-quality early childhood education for all, flexible working arrangements across public and private organisations as well as improving maternity and paternity leave facilities for parents. For instance, family policies in the Nordic and Scandinavian countries emphasizes on the active involvement of fathers in child and family care as so that not only women who are burdened with household chores and work. Based on the experience of developed countries such as Sweden, France, Belgium and Luxembourg, the implementation of such comprehensive family policy will not only help families with children and enable parents (particularly mothers) to work, rather, their relatively stable fertility rate is one of the indirect consequences, promoting equality between women and men and subsequently made their countries happier than the rest of the world.



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