



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY  
CRIS

Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies



## Future Trends Series - GR:REEN Project

### Title of the report

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**Demographic Change and the Environment**

### Area

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Demography

### Reporter

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Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (United Kingdom)

### Type of the Reporter

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Governmental Body

### Periodically updated?

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Yes

### First issued year

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1971

### Latest update

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2011

### Official website

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[http://www.viewsoftheworld.net/data/Demography\\_RCEP\\_report.pdf](http://www.viewsoftheworld.net/data/Demography_RCEP_report.pdf)

### Language available

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English

### Short summary

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The latest report from the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in the UK is observing the environmental challenges the UK will face as a result of changes in the distribution and number of people in the UK up to 2050. Studies focusing on total population ignore where people live and work. Regional development policy is a much more effective way of protecting the environment. As people have become more affluent, consumption has tended to increase substantially. National income has more than doubled in the last forty years, while the population has grown by only ten per cent. The demand for new housing and related development as a result of demographic change will increasingly engender environmental constraints that can be managed but at a significant economic and environmental cost.

### Key trends

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- "The sheer number of people is not likely to be the most significant influence on environmental quality in the UK over the next 40 years";
- "Office for National Statistics (ONS) projections suggest a population increase from 61.4 million people in 2008 to 71.6 million in 2033. Although population growth is generally perceived to lead to greater environmental impacts, the relationship is complex and not linear."
- "The total number of people will continue to grow, and at a rate which is faster than over the last

twenty years”;

- “Life expectancy will continue to increase, so the population will be on average older, and the number of older and very old people will grow faster than the population as a whole”;
- “People will live in smaller households on average, and so the number of households will grow faster than the population”;
- “The pattern of demographic change is far from uniform – indeed, it is highly variable, according to local circumstances.”
- “While an increase in the population of the UK has added to the environmental impact, in practice changes in the other two factors – ‘affluence’ and ‘technology’ – have been of far greater importance.”

## Suggestions

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- “Adequate mechanisms to ensure that the environmental implications of demographic change are assessed must be retained, and in some cases developed. There will inevitably be issues that cannot be adequately addressed at a purely local level and it is unlikely that these issues will be fully dealt with at the national level. Given the probable gap between the national and local, processes to ensure that local planning authorities can be held to account beyond as well as within their borders are crucial”;
- “The Commission recommends that Government reviews environmental assessment guidance and requirements to ensure that development and spatial planning is appropriately informed by assessments at the right spatial and temporal scale to reflect the social, economic and environmental impacts of demographic change”.
- “The Commission recommends that Government ensures existing regional data sets are protected and made available, and that they continue to be developed to meet the needs of new administrative structures”;
- “The Commission recommends that Government commission research to understand the relative costs (environmental, social and economic) of accommodating development in areas facing environmental constraints and of economic development incentives designed to encourage development in areas facing fewer environmental constraints”;
- “The Commission recommends that the Office for National Statistics include in its programme for the development of population projections more sophisticated methodologies for forecasting populations at more local levels. These methodologies should also reflect more fully the uncertainties inherent in the forecasts”;
- “The Commission recommends that the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations ensure as a matter of urgency that the environmental impacts of demographic trends be taken fully into account in developing policies and programmes at national and local levels. We recommend Government identify a lead department, for example, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) or the Cabinet Office in England, to be responsible for this”;
- “The Commission recommends a step change in Government efforts to increase resource use efficiency, so as to radically decouple consumption from environmental impacts. This the Commission regards as a matter of urgency.”

## Methodology

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Research from primary and secondary sources  
Projections and Modelling

## Reference to other trends reports? If yes, which reports?

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