



Empowering young people to plan their families can help countries harness the ‘demographic dividend,’ the boost in economic productivity that occurs when there are more people in the workforce relative to the number of people outside of it.

With current estimates indicating that about 83 million people are born every year, [World Population Day](#) is focusing on the urgent need for family planning.

“Family planning, with its effect on timing of the pregnancy has a direct effect on the reduction of child, maternal and infant mortality in general. Reducing this burden on the health systems alleviate resources, which can then be allocated for development elsewhere,” Benoit Kalasa, director of UNFPA’s Technical Division, said during a visit to Brussels.

Even if fertility levels continue to decline, the [global population is expected](#) to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100.

Since these people will eventually have to share the world's resources, it is necessary to ensure the best future conditions. This begins with [family planning](#) and youth empowerment – enabling young people to both choose when to have a child, and how many they want, Mr. Kalasa explained .

“Now, if there is no family planning, adolescents are more likely to get pregnant and, in many places, drop out of school. This is a loss for the person, for the family, the community and the country. Losing people from the educational system is the same as losing human capital, and there is no economic growth, no development, without human capital.”

UNFPA calls sexual information and education both empowerment and a human right. Still, poor family planning affects some [214 million women](#) around the world. The concept is central to [gender equality](#) and a key factor in reducing poverty and propelling development.

This is especially important in developing countries, where some measure of conservatism often stands in the way of informing and helping young people with “the risks of reproduction”, such as risky abortions, sexual transmitted diseases and other dangers.

Countries with both increasing numbers of young people and declining fertility in particular have the potential to reap a demographic dividend. With [more than half](#) of the world population's growth projected to occur in Africa by 2050, countries of this continent have tremendous potential.

“In the mid-70s, South Korea had the same mortality and fertility as Ghana does today. But the government decided to invest in education, good health and empowering women by creating new jobs and giving them access to the labour market. Today, South Korea is an upper-middle-income country, almost at the same level as the developed nations,” said Mr. Kalasa.

“If you visit these places physically and you see the types of young people that are there, you can see the transformation, that things are changing. When you visit private companies,

governments, parliaments, you witness an emergence of gender equality, gender parity, in most of these sectors. You see the emergence of a middle class and development in these countries. That is the demographic dividend becoming evident. You can see it. You can monitor it,” said Mr. Kalasa.



Family planning is just the first step of a broader, horizontal collaboration across many sectors. Currently, UNFPA aims to bring family planning to an additional 120 million women by 2020, and urges all governments to invest in the long-term vision for their national development. And Benoit Kalasa “wants this understanding to be clear to everyone; young people as well as leaders and decision makers”.

“The returns are not today or tomorrow. You will see them much later. So, the political will has to be strong. The commitment has to be strong,” he says, underscoring the need for good governance, combating corruption and establishing legal frameworks and fiscal spaces for job creation and access to credit.

“We say that the youth are the future. But it is today that we need to take care of the youth. Not tomorrow.

In 2017 World Population Day, 11 July, coincides with the [Family Planning Summit](#) taking place in London, the second meeting of the FP2020–Family Planning 2020–initiative.