

# Golini: How to Ease the Pain of Mass Migration

Italian population expert Antonio Golini says the planet's migratory flux is likely to exceed modest UN estimates, changing the look of the world. At the same time, he rejects doom-and-gloom forecasts. He cites migration patterns between Romania and Italy as an example of a boom that was followed by stabilization and relative harmony. He also sees the growth of small and medium-sized cities as a way of offsetting the destabilizing effects of mass urbanization.



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**I**taly's Antonio Golini is a leading expert on global population trends and a member of a number of international commissions, including the UN Commission on Population and Development, a body he has also chaired. He teaches demographics at Rome's La Sapienza university and is the author of a number of publications, including "Il futuro della popolazione nel mondo" ("The Future of the World's Population). He was interviewed by east about the relationship between population and global governance in the coming years.

**United Nations estimates, revised in 2008, suggest that the current global population of 6.8 billion will pass the seven billion mark in 2011 and will reach more than nine billion by 2050. Given the general declines in fertility, it should peak around mid-century and then stabilize. Are you comfortable with these assessments?**

Yes. The stabilization may not occur in 2050, but it's fair to assert that explosive population growth should stop around mid-century.

**In your mind, how reliable is the prediction that the world will have 2.5 billion more inhabitants by 2050, over the next 40 years?**

Demographers prefer to talk about projections and not predictions. So let's just say the forecasts have a strong foundation in fact. Let me explain. We know, for example, how many women 30 are on the planet and can measure their fertility rate. This allows us to reliably approximate the number of births in any given territory. If you want a comparison, it's a bit like assessing the number of cars which come out of a plant knowing the number of workers it has and their average productivity.

We can make similar assessments when it comes to mortality. We know the number of elderly people and can track their aging process: it's a variable, age, that moves only in one direction, and which increases at the same speed. As a result, mortality forecasts are reliable. Of course in talking about the distant future things always get more complicated, because we lack knowledge

FACING PAGE African migrant laborers following clashes with police in the Calabria, Italy town of Rosarno. The January 2010 violence began after several immigrants were wounded by pellets fired from an air rifle.

of contextual conditions. For example, the forecast that the world's population would reach six billion in 2000 was first made in the 1960s, and it's proven correct.

**Do you consider the baseline numbers regarding global population today, as reliable?**

While it's true we cannot say precisely how many people live in Rome, but the more you look at broader categories, the more you can be confident that your numbers are correct. What that means is that in the context of the larger numbers, such as global population, variability in 50-100 million-inhabitant range doesn't really alter the substance of things.

**Even in large countries such as China?**

The international statistical system now interacts with all nations to ensure that adequate statistical expertise is

brought to bear even in states that are not highly developed when it comes to these kinds of measurement. Moreover, governments themselves are increasingly concerned with obtaining reliable figures. Finally, in many cases smaller samples are conducted to better assess the reliability of the larger numbers.

Naturally things get complicated in the case of the existence of large migratory movements, which are always hard to assess. Overall, however, the system works. Annually, the United Nations brings together a panel of experts to evaluate the changes taking place based on new available data, and forecasts are updated every two years.

**On the subject of migration, the UN forecasts that some 2.4 million people annually will change country between now and 2050. That would make the migration total**



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**less 100 million. Isn't this too small number, give the size of population growth and the appalling living conditions that exist in many spots of the planet?**

In my opinion, yes. While experts have compiled the number, there is a degree of political conditioning. The UN doesn't feel up to talking about potentially larger migration numbers, since they become unwieldy.

At the same time, if you consider that according to UN forecasts to 2050, Europe will decrease by 70 million inhabitants and Africa will increase by one billion, you realize that the limited number of migrants already included in this forecast will not be realistic in front of these extraordinary imbalances.

**Would it be better to introduce radically different data, in hypothetical terms?**

Hard to say. Europe is a very crowded continent, with legal, physical and human structures that have been consolidated over centuries. Emigrating to Bruges or Siena isn't like going to Tucson, Arizona, which was the Far West of the American 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I think the only manageable answer is to re-examine changing migration patterns. In addition to forecasting limited long-term immigration, there has to be a more flexible approach, which includes those who reap the benefits of temporary migration. This kind of approach will also avoid stripping the country of origin of its fundamental human capital, as well as its economic and physical resources, and better allow it to raise and educate migrants. Something like this is happening between Italy and Romania. Romania's entry into the European Union brought an upheaval, with large number of Romanian immigrants moving to Italy. But that trend has since stabilized, with many Romanians who shuttle back-and-forth between the two countries. This confirms my general belief that the great problems of the future only be managed through a process of regionalization.

**What does this mean in effective terms?**

We know the UN is unable to effectively manage major global issues. At the same time, not is the G20, which still reflects the interests of 20 countries. So where exactly do you put the other 180? For me, the world's problems call for regional strategies, based on the planets five or six major regions, meaning that regional states have to assist one another.

**But is really enough time to implement what amounts to a new and complex political geography? Some think tanks, including the People Institute, have forecast a "perfect storm of negative conditions by 2030. They predict demographic, environmental, consumer and economic crises severe enough to cause global havoc.**

It certainly is a race against time. The risks that lay ahead regarding the limits of growth were already set down by Dennis Meadows for the Club of Rome. It was only the 1970s, but even then questions came up regarding the interaction of demography with other variables, including economic and environmental ones. What was underestimated at the time was impact of technological innovations in agriculture, in services, and on industry.

Today technological unknown is just as important. For example, major progress is being made in terms of creating clean energy. To advances in technology you have to add increased broader public awareness. For example, how many people, decades ago, would have bet that the fight against smoking would have produced such sensational results? Today, we are witnessing the birth of a new ecological awareness, and with it the knowledge that global consumption patterns have to change.

Let me give you two examples that concern Italy. It's unimaginable to think that 22 million Italian households have 35 million cars. It's no longer acceptable. Just as its unthinkable to continue thinking that each day an Italian throws away 700 to 800 calories.

**How did you get to that number?**

It 's simple. Based on Italy's agricultural production and international food balance, the average Italian has access to about 3,100 calories a day. Fortunately, not all these calories are actually consumed; otherwise Italy would be a nation of obese people. What it does mean is that 700 to 800 calories are wasted. Instead of discarding them, those calories could better used.

**No doubt consumer patters have to change in developed countries, but what about the need to increase demographic education in developing countries? We cannot take for granted that fertility levels in the developing world will keep decreasing...**

Demographic education is certainly necessary for ex-

ample, in sub-Saharan Africa, but be careful with this: in countries where infant mortality is still high and where the livelihood comes from family agriculture, children are a guarantee for the future. It's not enough just to give am African farmer a condom. He has to become convinced that it's in his own interests to limit the birth rate. There are also cultural boulders that are hard to move. If you believe, as indeed happens in parts of Africa, that children are the reincarnated souls of the elderly, limiting children means condemning many souls to a life of wandering without reincarnated. That aside, fertility rates are declining, albeit slowly. In Latin America they've reached near-European levels; though until a few years ago having many children was a sign of virility. The truth is that demographics have their own momentum: the global population is growing at a pace that not even

In Shiwa, Zambia, the sons of a laborer pose in front of an old tractor.



nuclear war could beat back. But it also has intrinsic checks and balances. People who move to cities and towns tend to have fewer children, for example.

**The world's urban population has surpassed those living in rural areas. The countryside-to-city tendency seems entrenched. In your book, you see this trend less of a problem than a part of the solution. Why?**

Historically, the city has always been an incubator for social and professional, a driving force. The countryside has traditionally been exclusionary. In cities, you have easier access to health care, education and essential services, starting with electricity and water. That doesn't mean urban life is free from extremely serious problems, particularly in sprawling mega-cities.

In my view, the Italian example could be useful to the world, namely small and medium-sized cities scattered throughout the country. But that's a political choice that requires great governance skills.