



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

# *Key fertility trends*

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Workshop on Global Demography Expert Survey on Drivers and Consequences of Demographic Change  
Brussels, Belgium



13 December 2023

# Outline

1. Fertility transition: global process
2. Global and regional fertility trends
3. EU countries in global perspective
4. Population impact of fertility trends
5. Conclusions for policy consideration

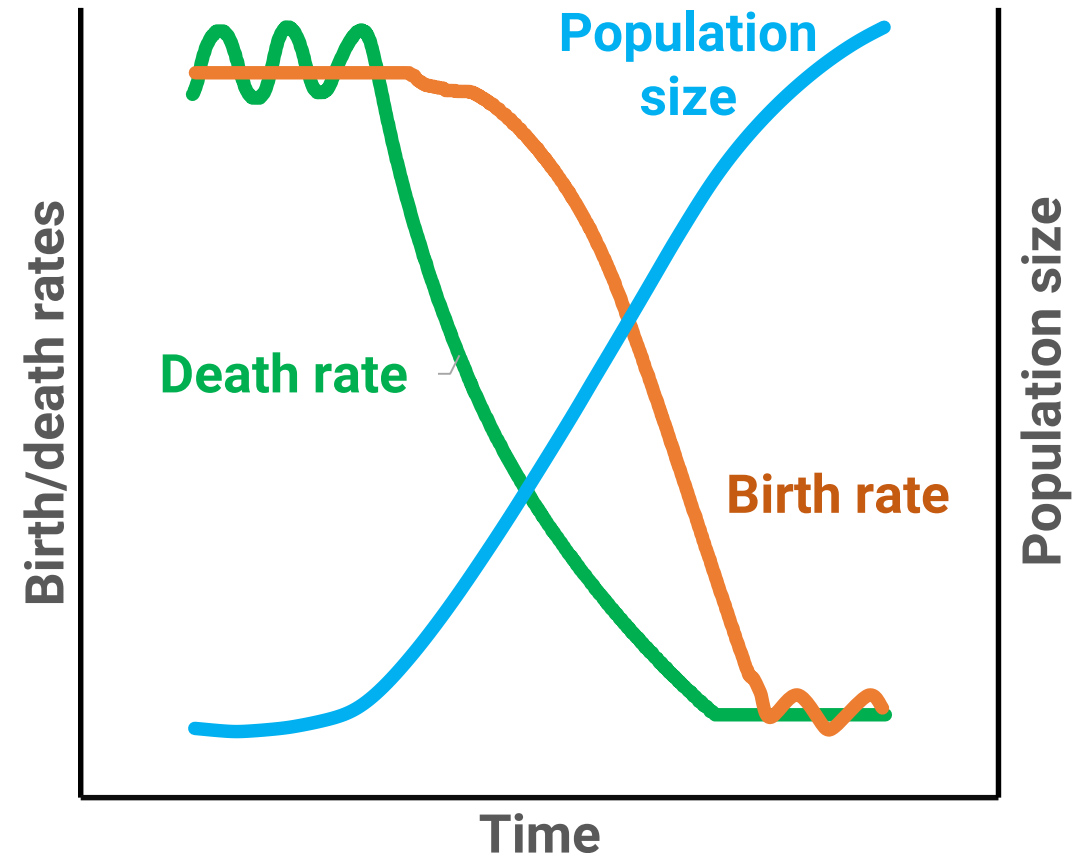
# United Nations World Population Prospects

- 1. For all countries in the world, a comprehensive, standardized and consistent set of estimates and projections of population size and the three components of population change: fertility, mortality and net international migration**
  - 237 countries or areas
  - Annual series from 1950 to 2021 (and projection until 2100)
- 2. Population and demographic estimates used for international comparisons**
- 3. Probabilistic population projections that serve as basis for various projection scenarios at the global, regional and national level**

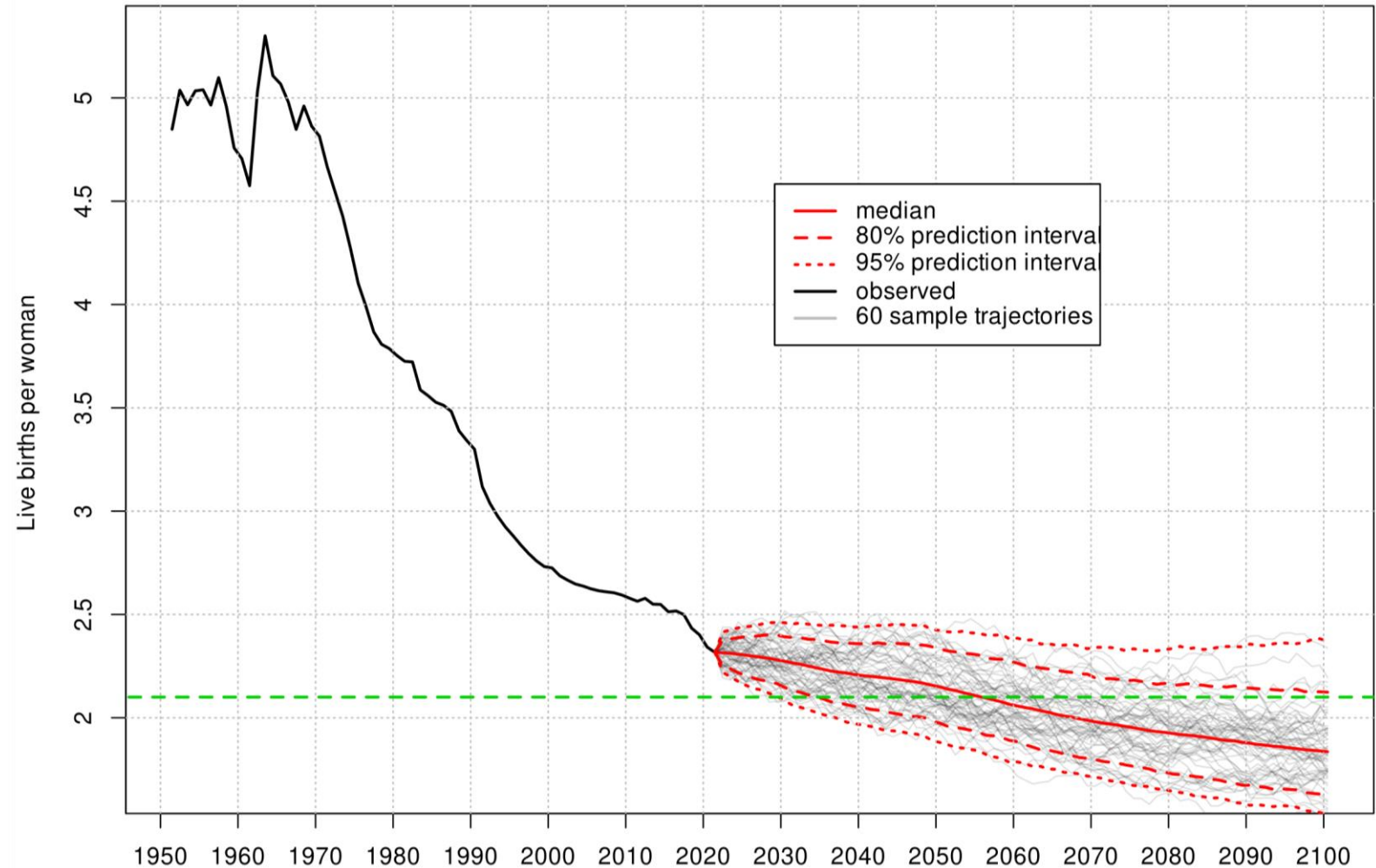
Online data: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

# Fertility decline part of the demographic transition

- Theories of the demographic transition share certain common points about the historical decline of fertility
  - reflecting changes in the economic and social costs and benefits of childbearing
  - linked to several key aspects of human development (reduction in child mortality, expanding education, urbanization, changes in women's roles, ability to control fertility)
- Transition from high to low values of TFR, typically followed by fluctuations and a modest recovery



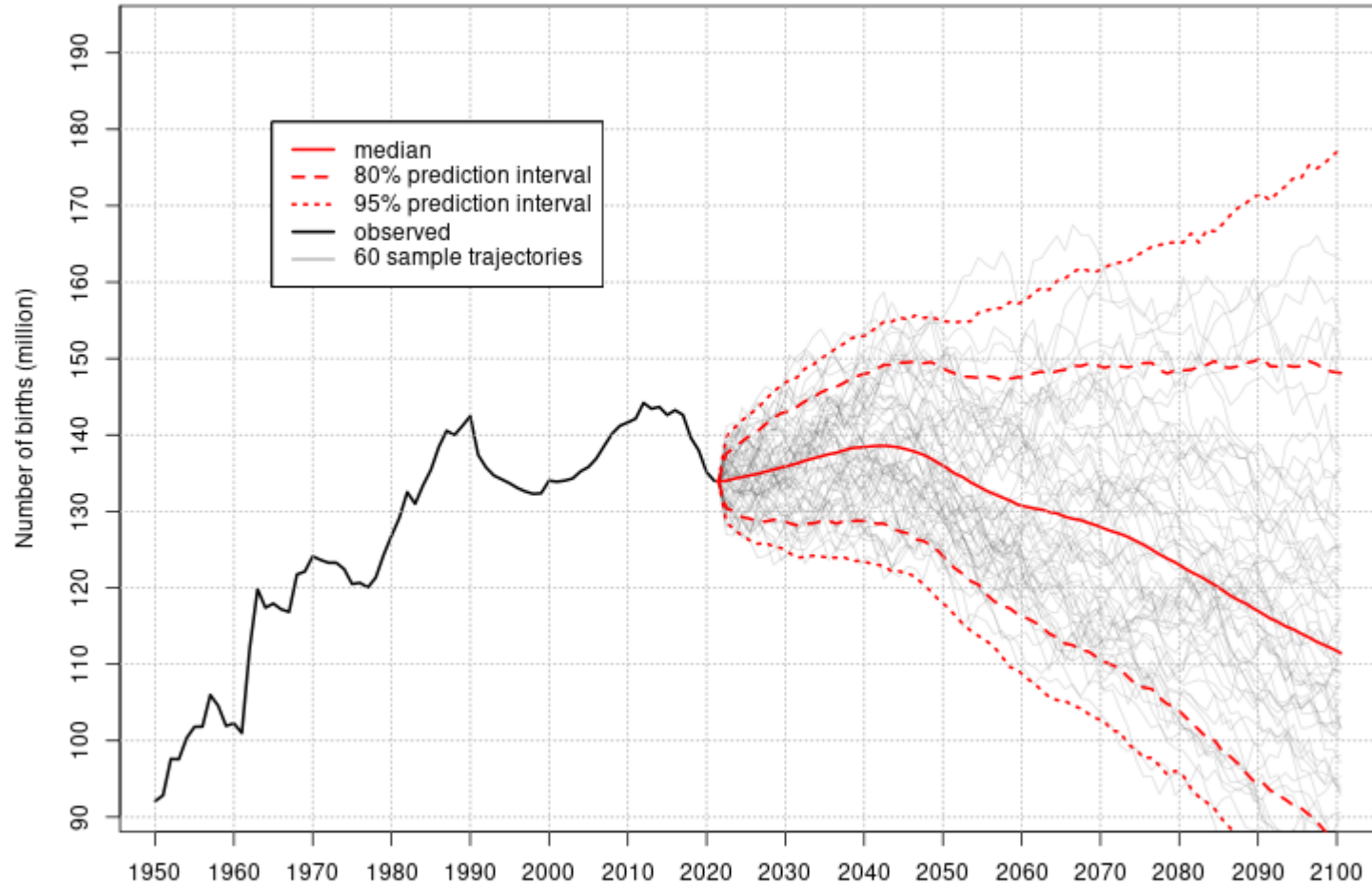
# Global fertility trends



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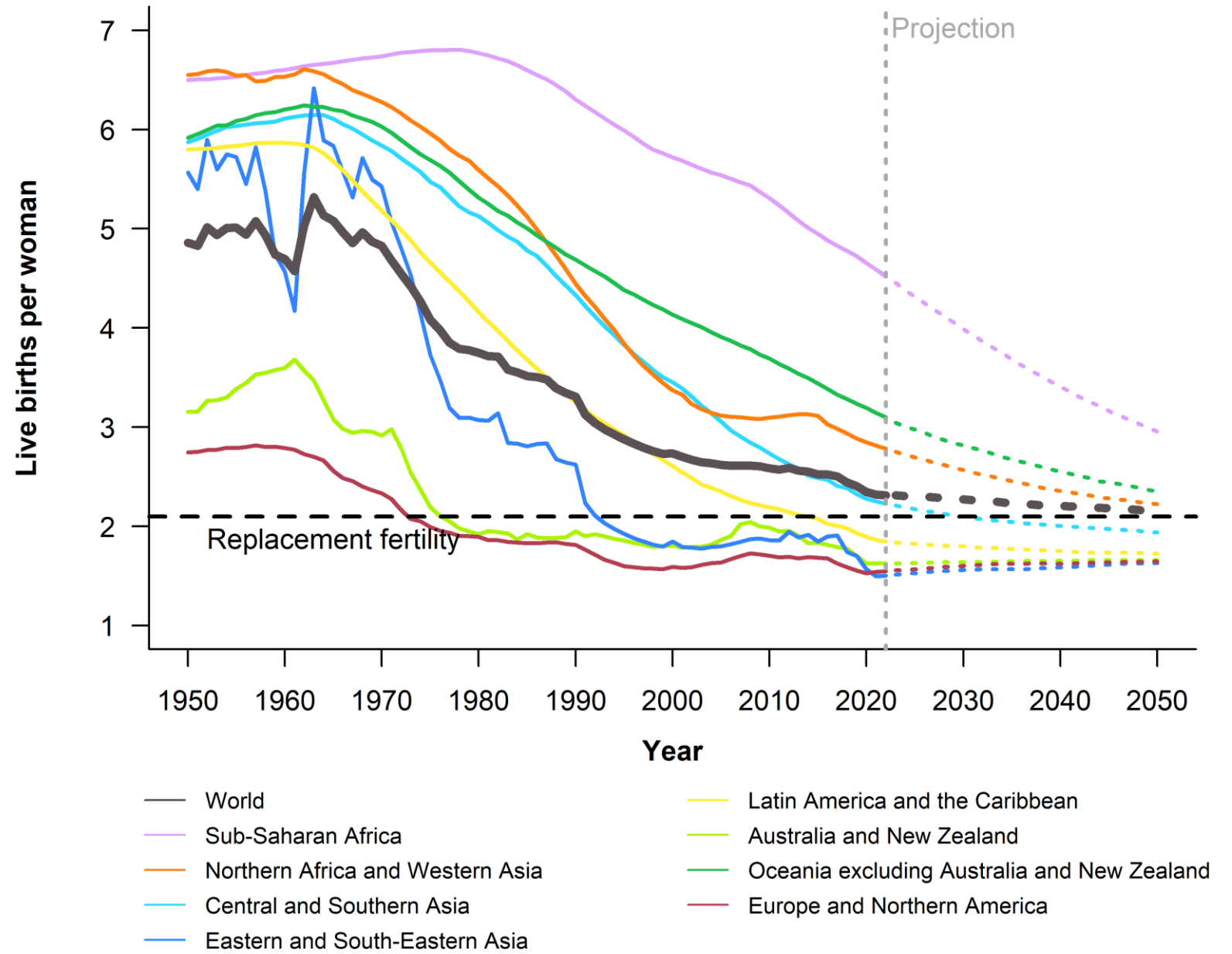
# Global number of births

World: Annual number of births



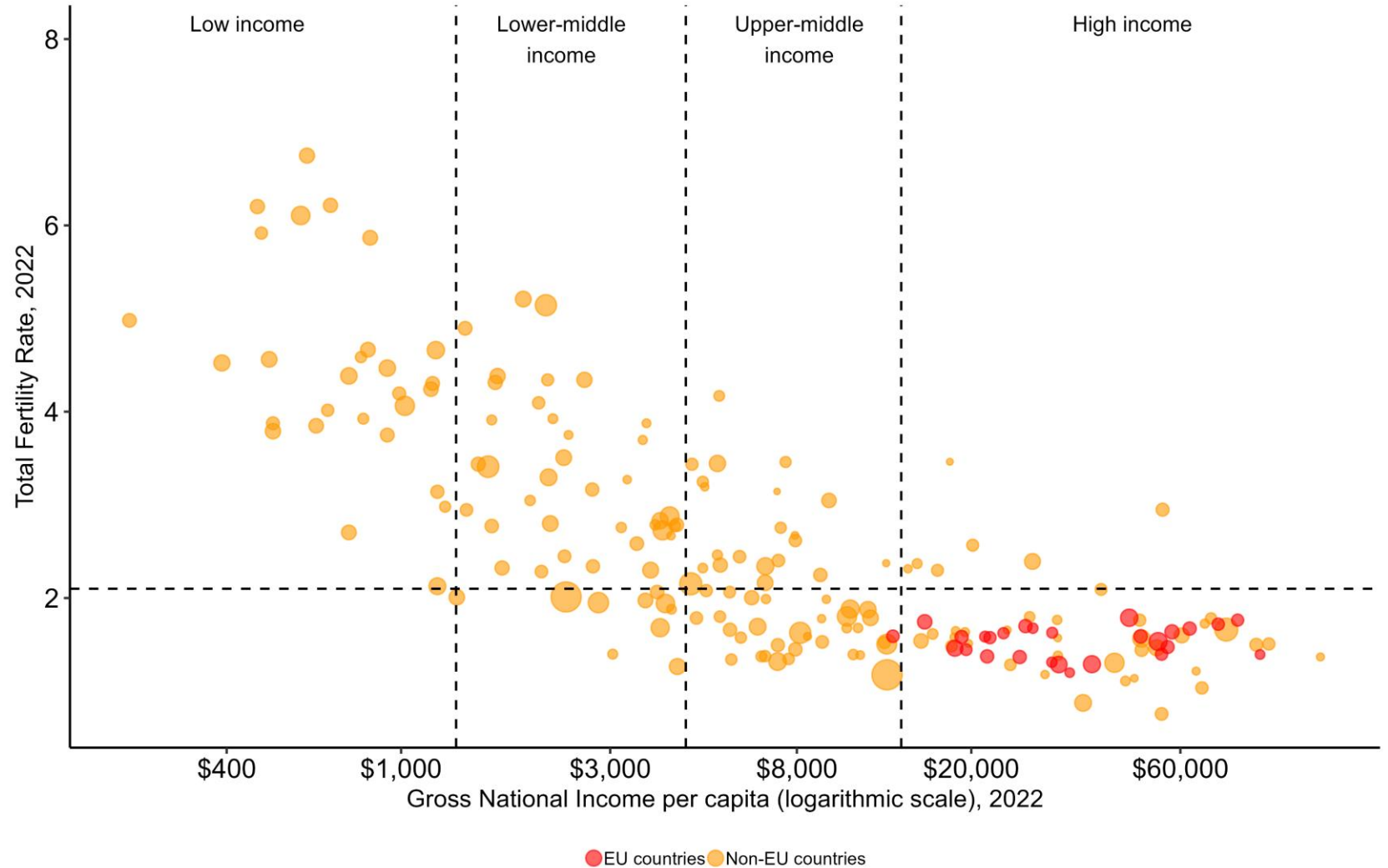
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# Regional trends in TFR



# Global experience of fertility decline

Estimates of Total Fertility Rate by Gross National Income per capita, 2022

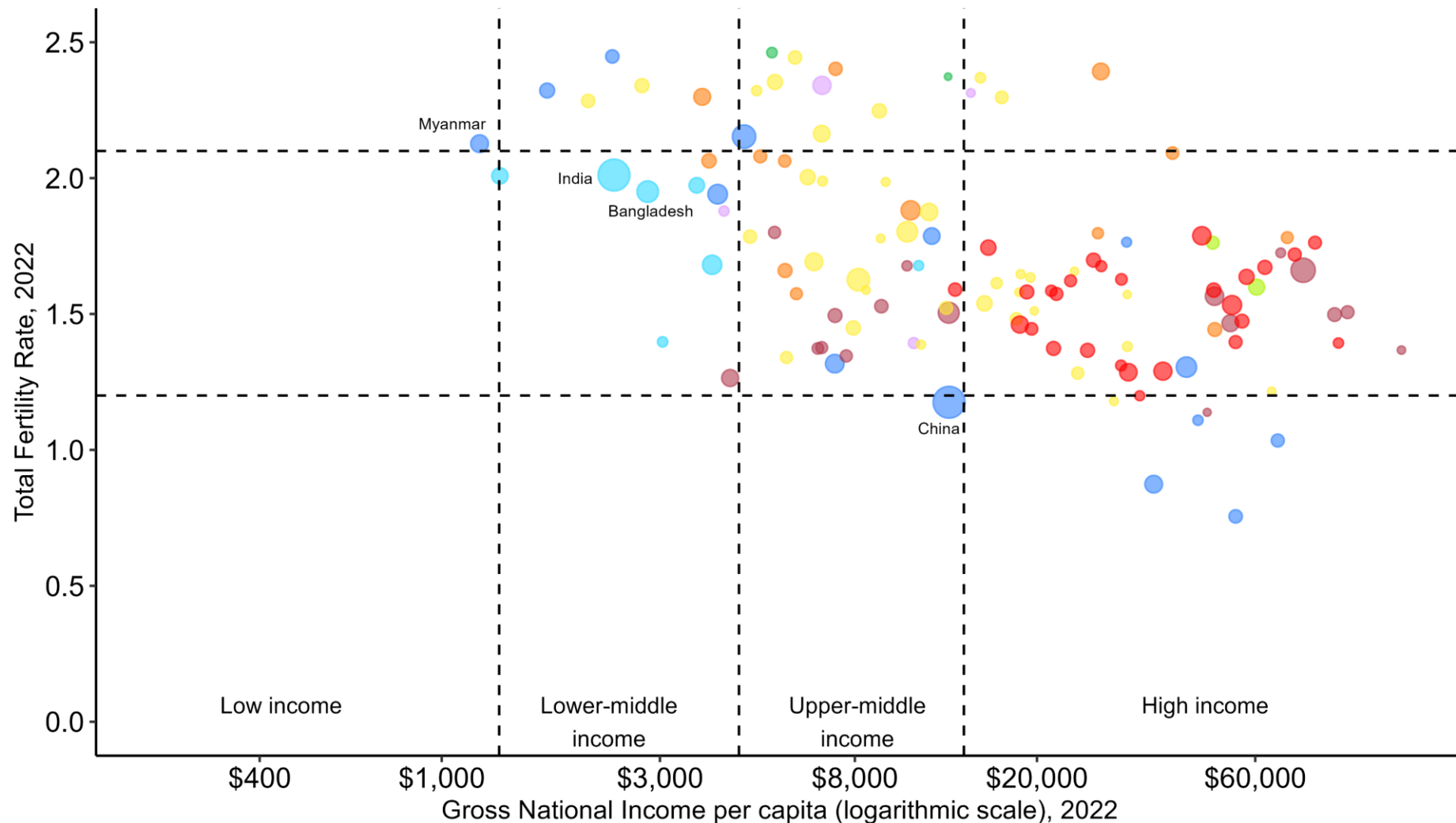


**In 2022, two thirds of the global population lived in the countries with TFR<2.1**



# Low fertility countries are in all regions

Estimates of Total Fertility Rate by Gross National Income per capita, 2022



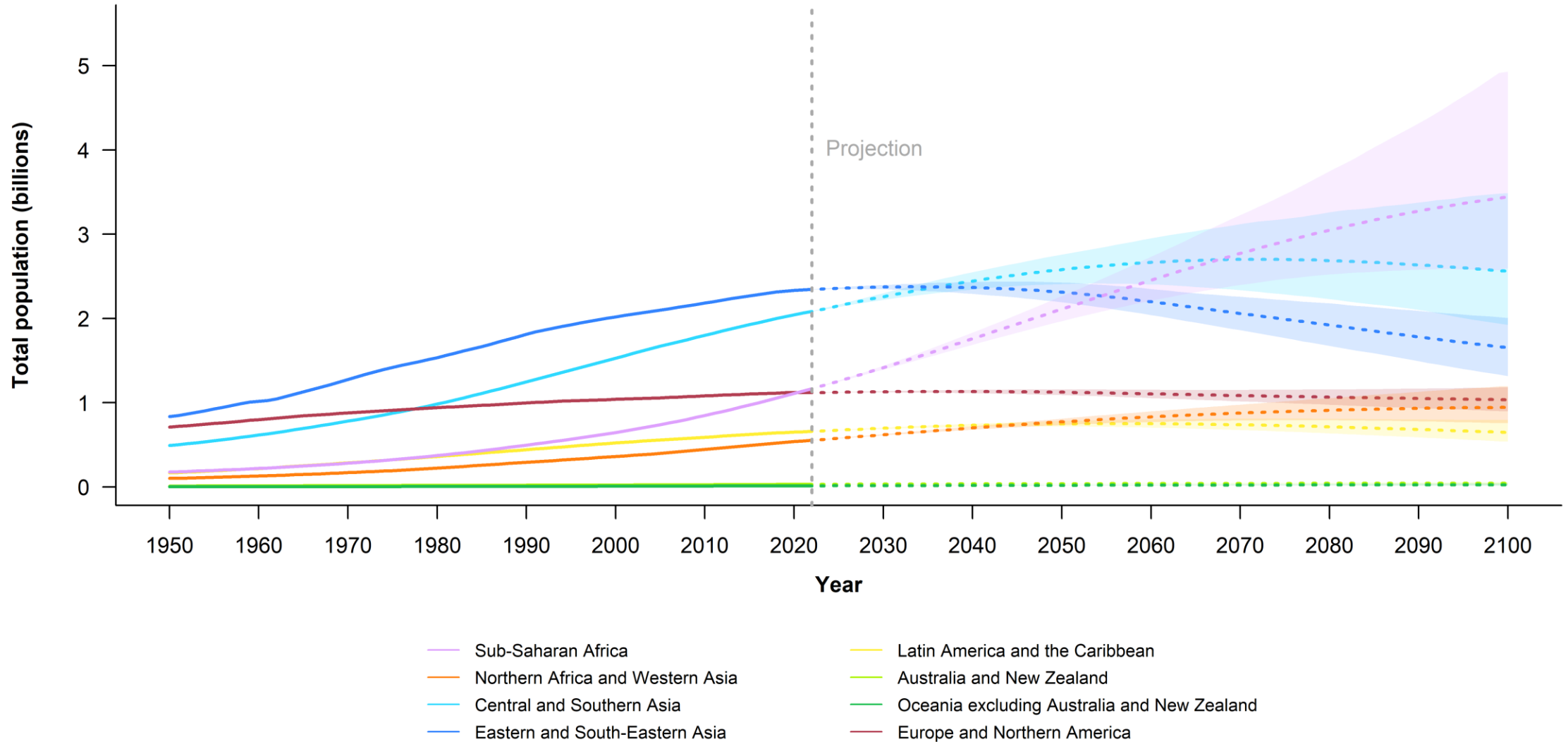
- Australia and New Zealand
- Central Asia and Southern Asia
- Eastern and South-Eastern Asia
- European Union
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Europe and Northern America
- Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- Northern Africa and Western Asia

Data sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022); The World Bank (2022), World Development Indicators, GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$). Countries with missing GNI per capita are located in the average GNI per capita of the corresponding income group. Countries with no income group classification and no GNI per capita are not displayed in the figure. The size of the circles is proportional to the total population in 2022.

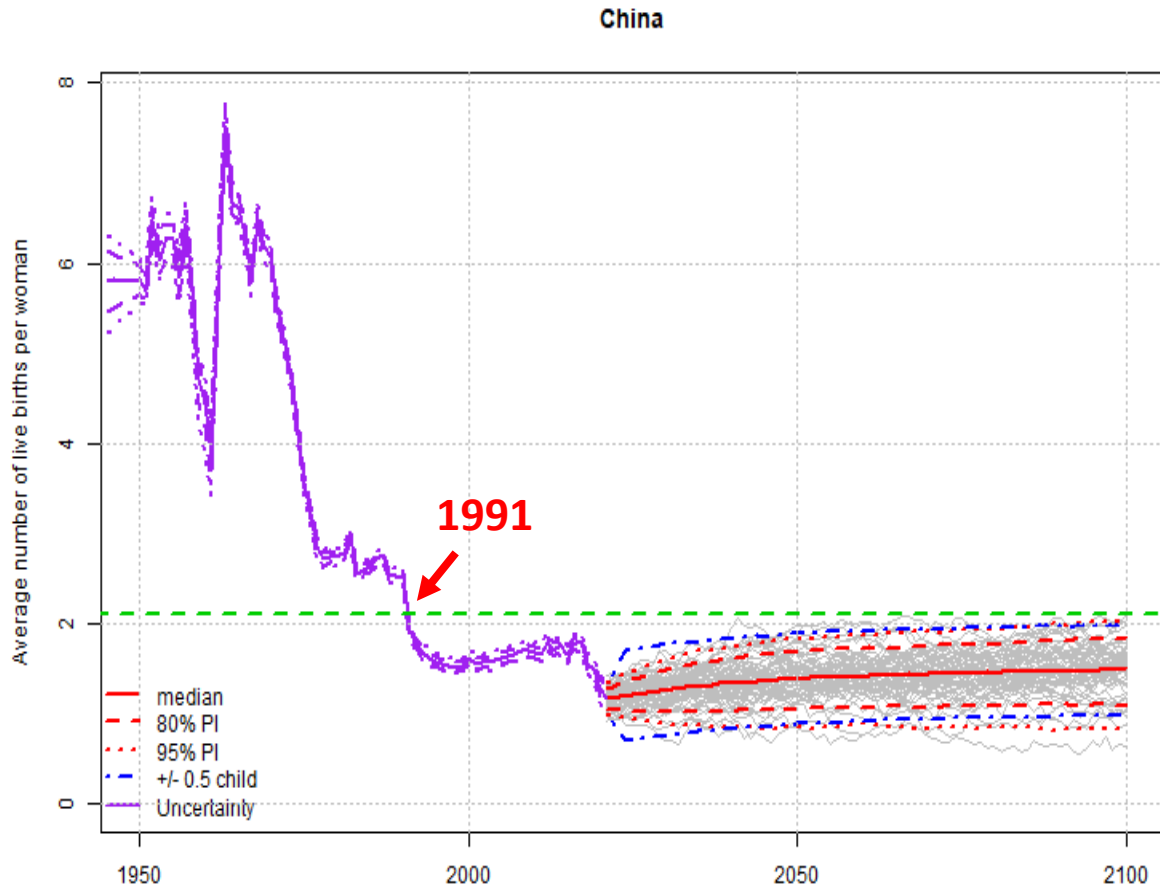
# Impact of fertility on population size

- Together with fertility, other demographic components play role in determining population size and age structures:
  - Increasing life expectancy – people live longer and healthier lives
  - International migration has become an important determinant for population change in some countries
  - Youthful age structure – large proportions of women in reproductive age groups (“population momentum”)
- TFR below 2 children per woman does not mean necessarily and immediately declining populations
- Impact is different for TFR = 1.1-1.3 or TFR = 1.6-1.8

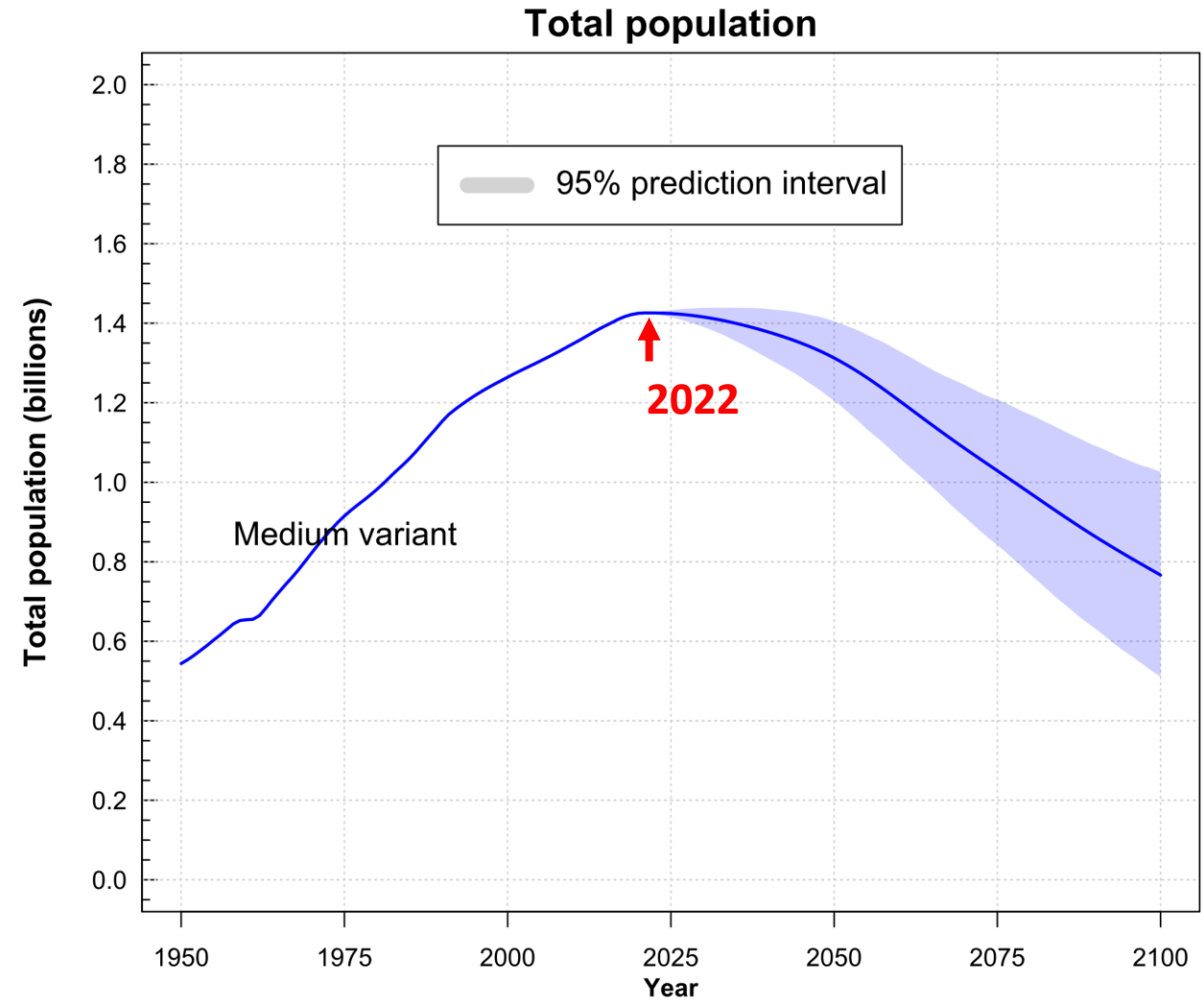
# Probabilistic projection – regional differences



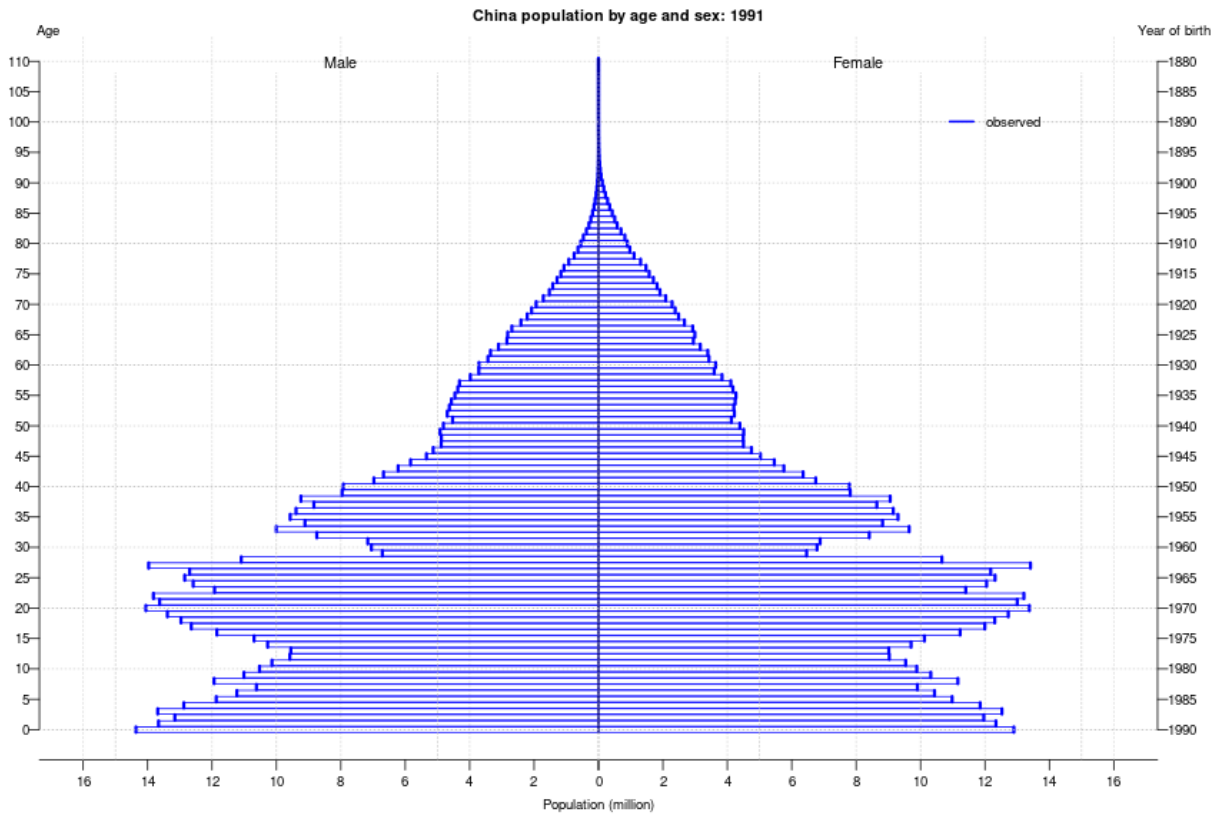
# China – fertility and population decline



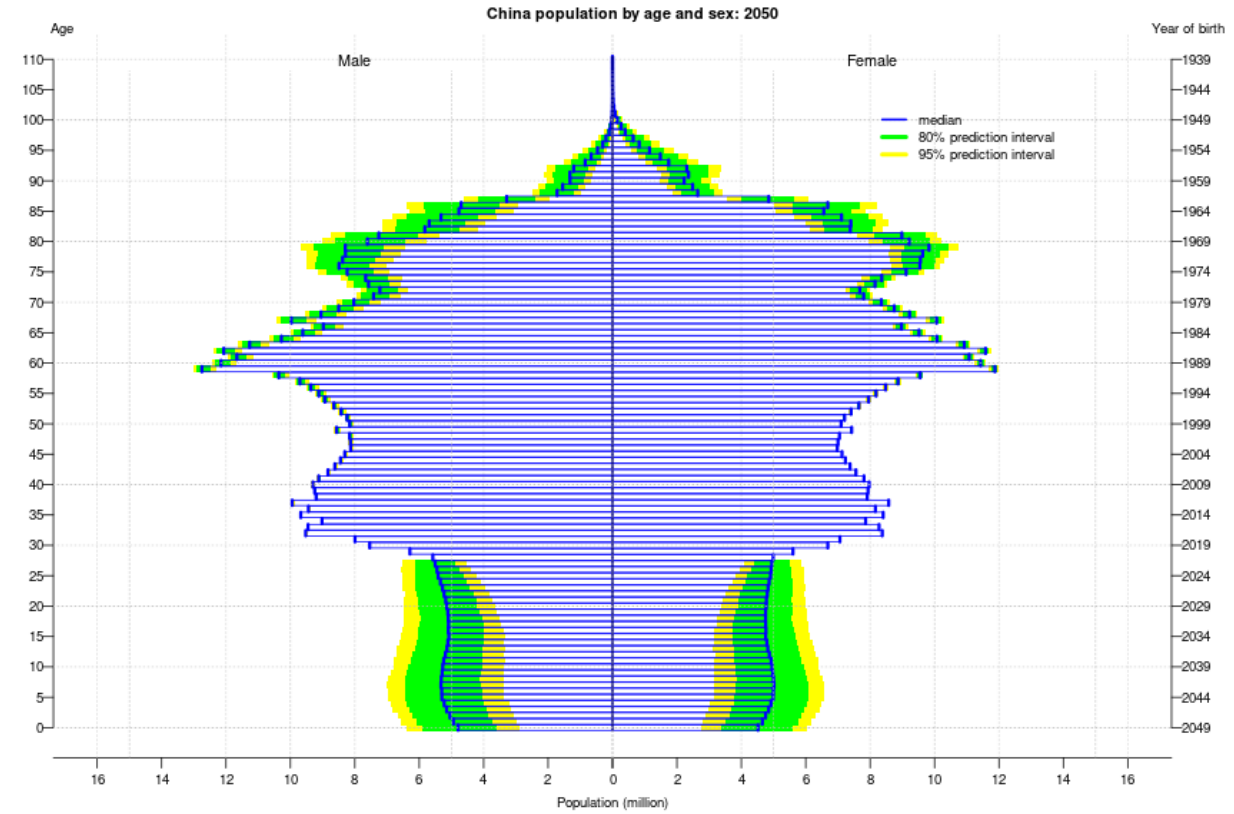
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# China – impact on population age structures



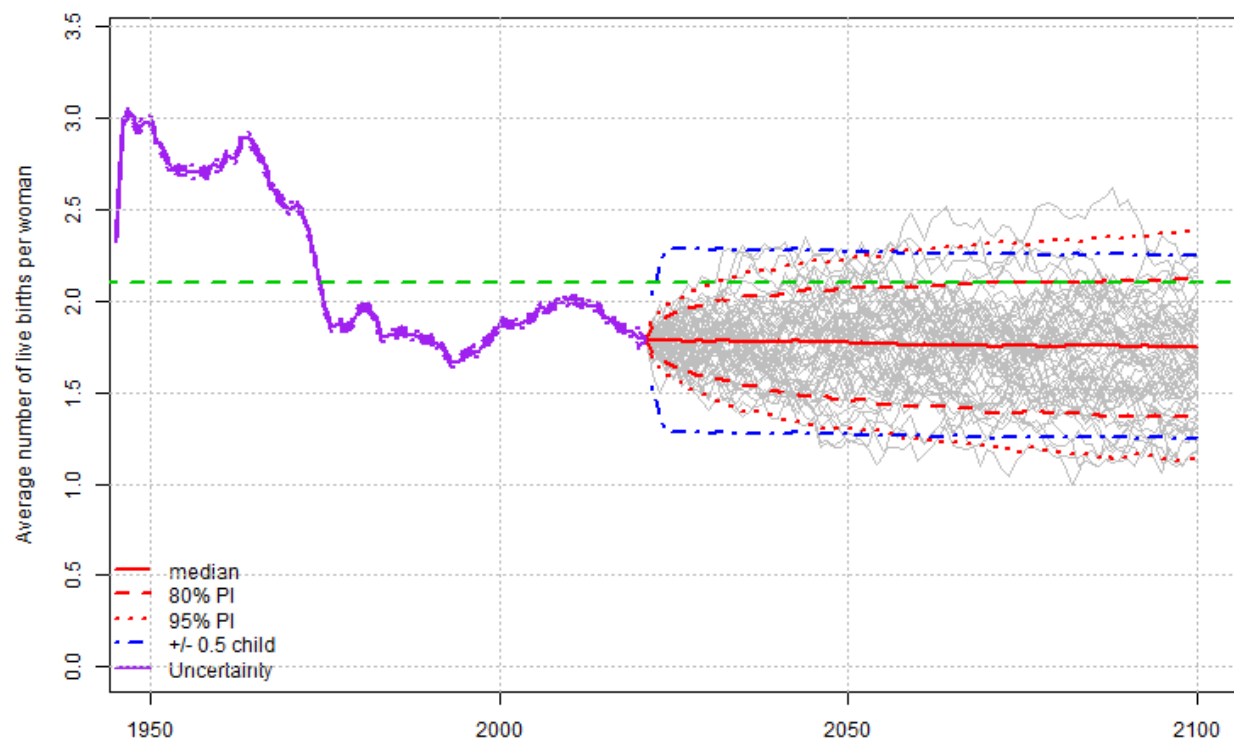
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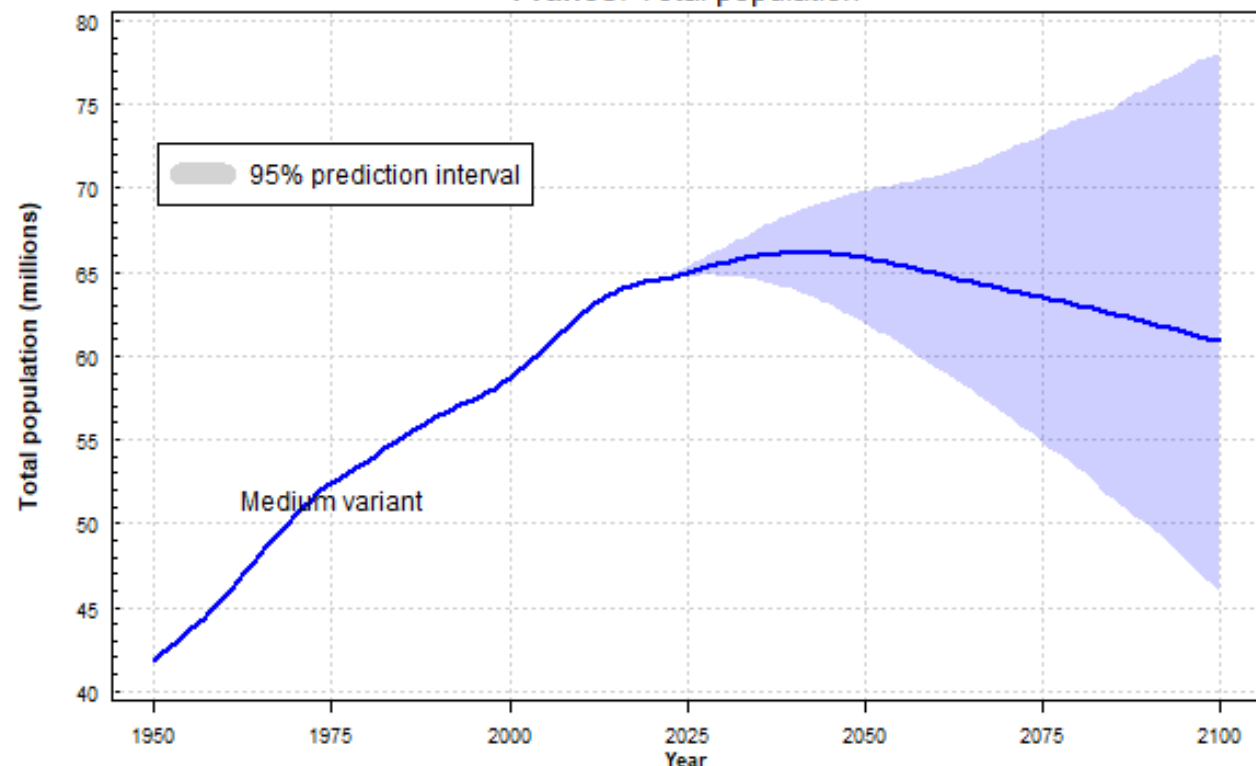
# France – stable fertility and population

France



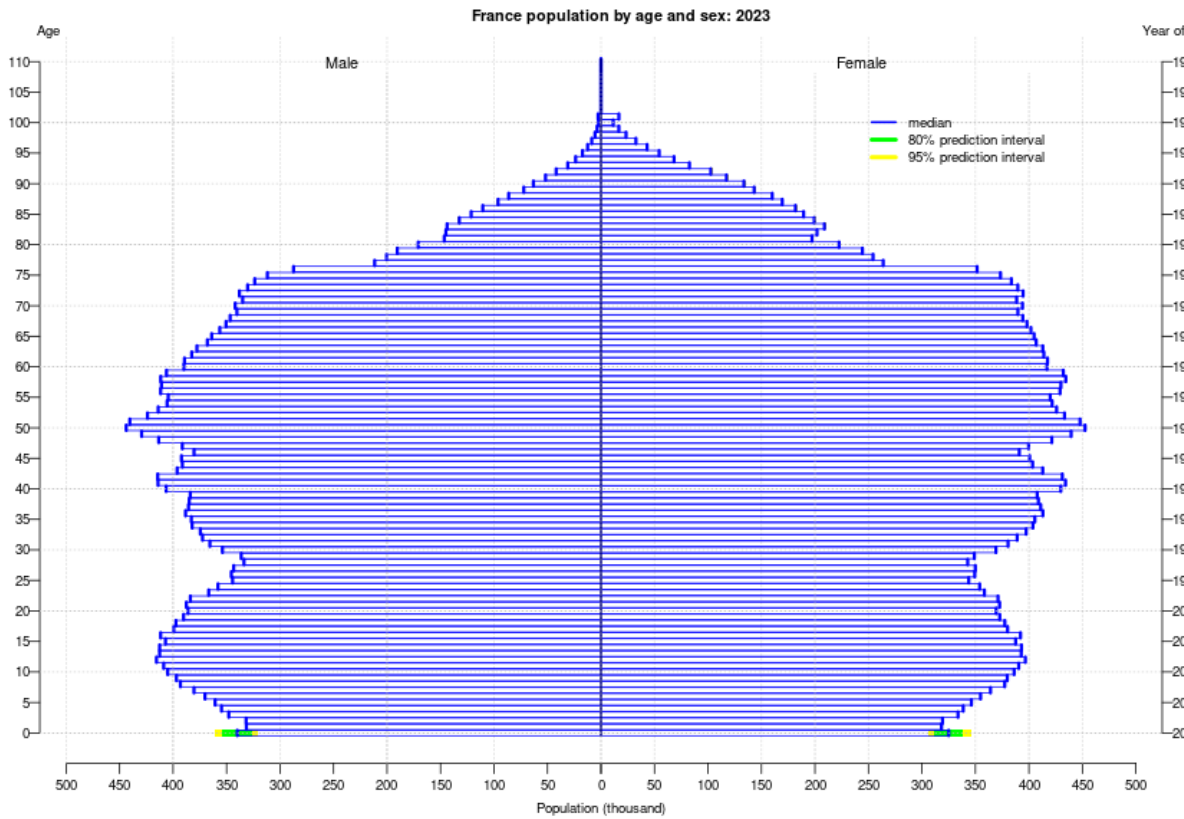
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France: Total population

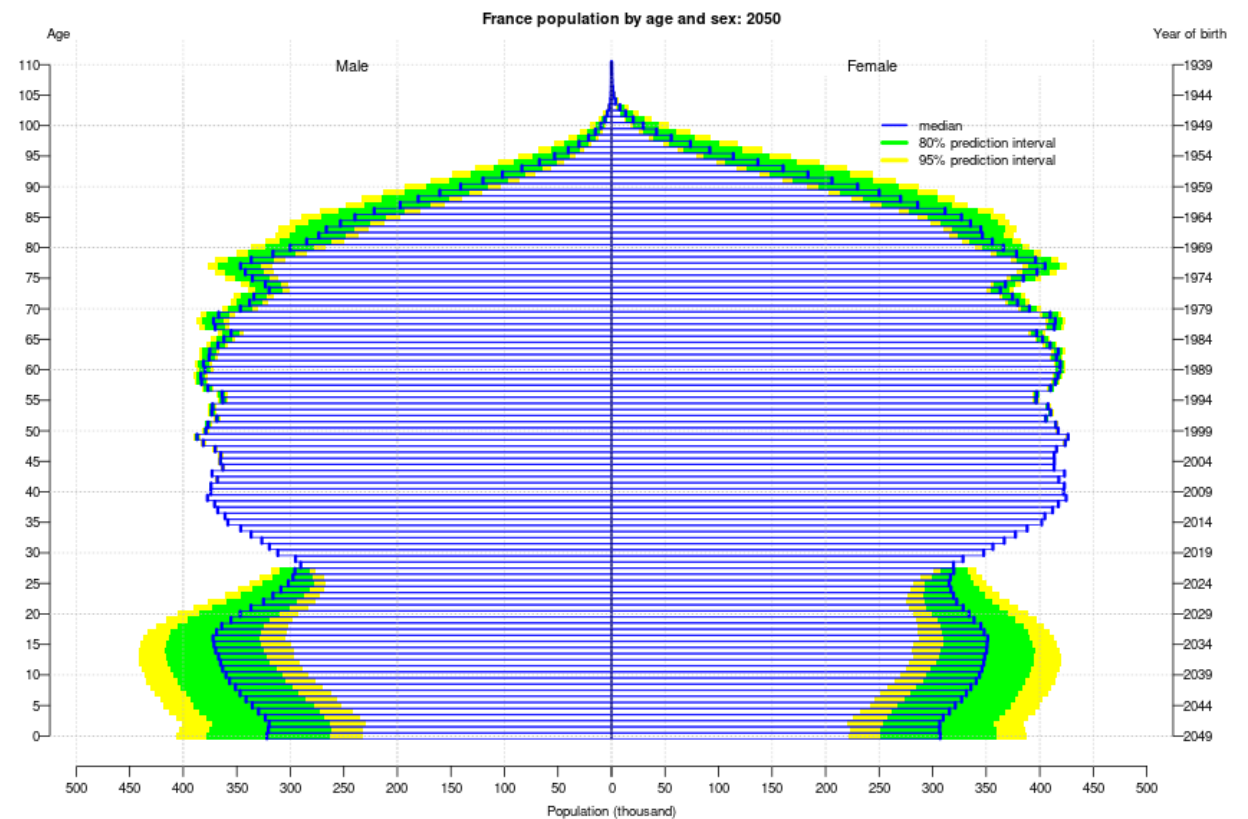


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# France – stable fertility and age structures



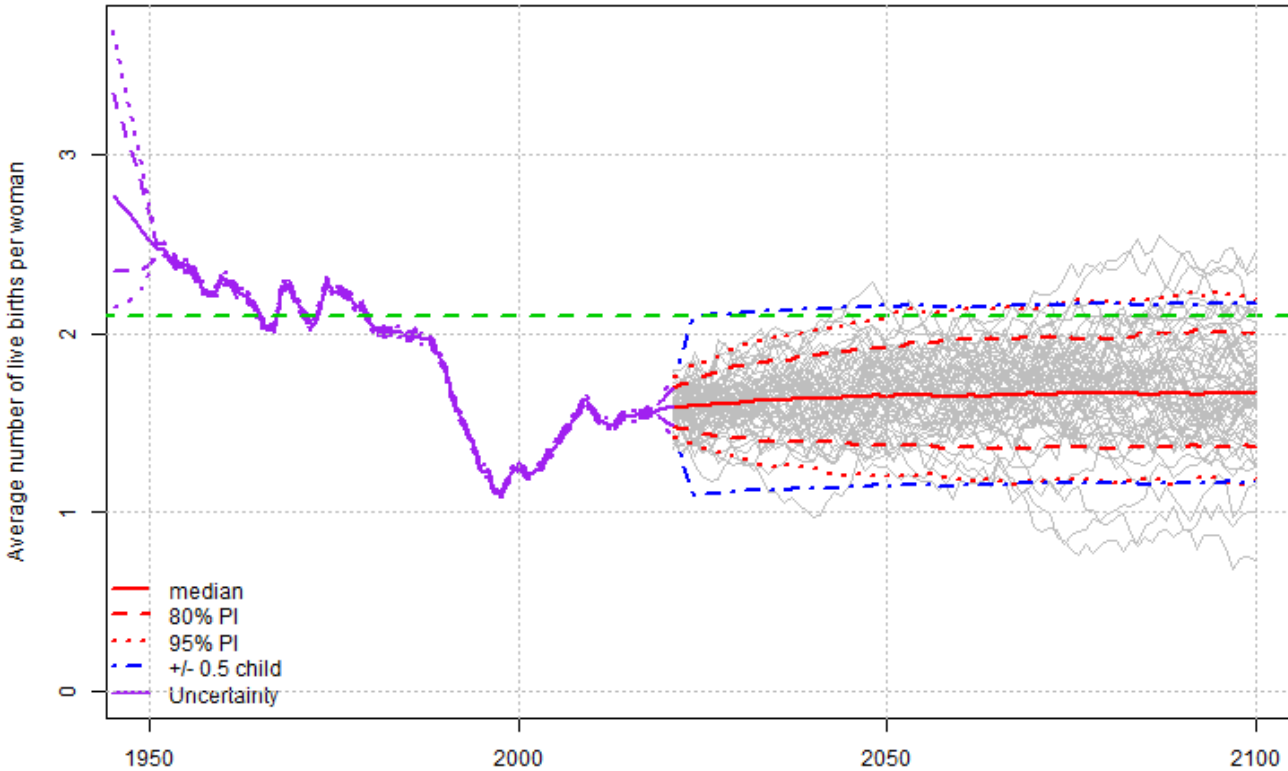
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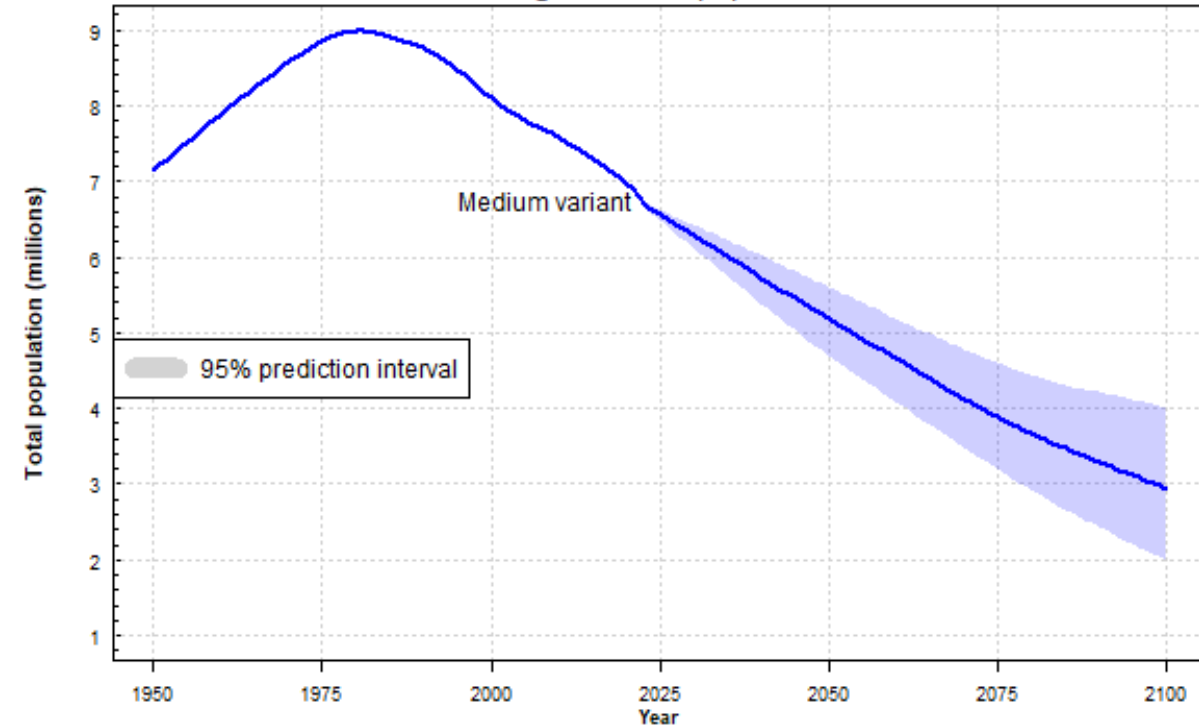
# Bulgaria – fertility and population decline

Bulgaria



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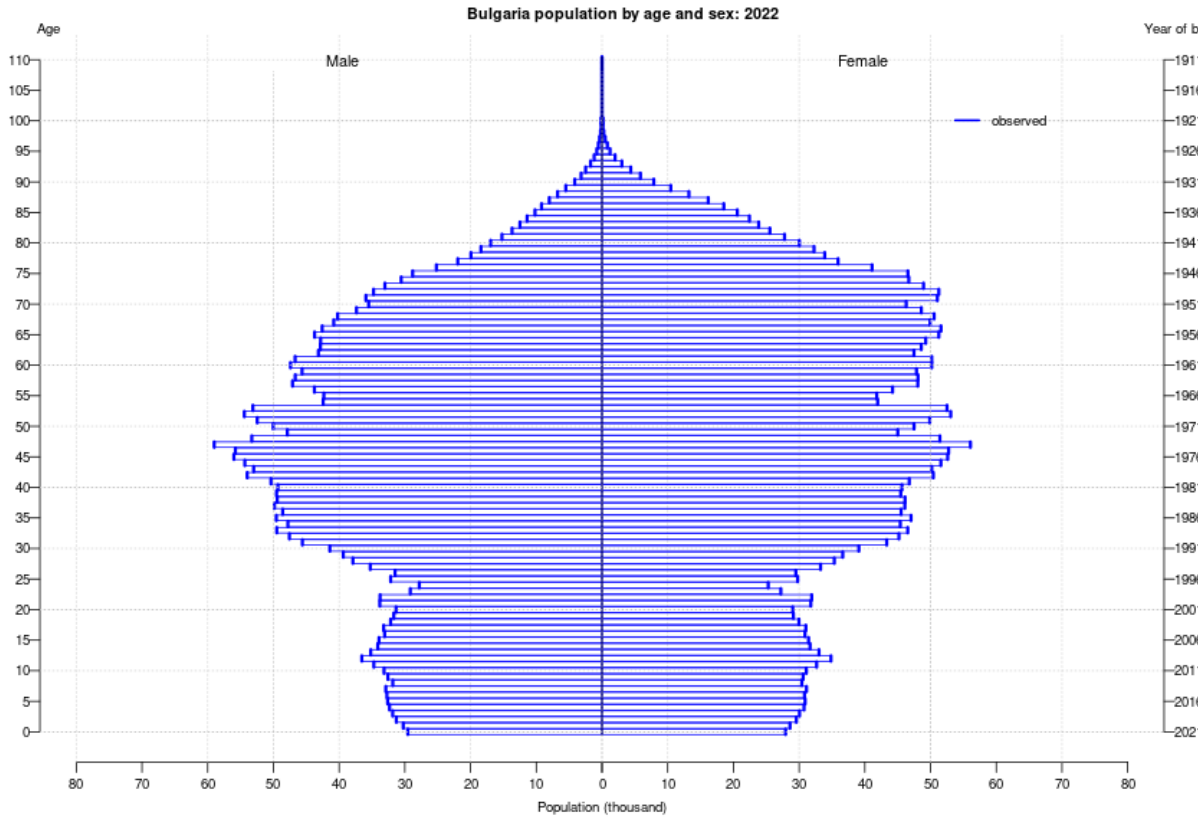
Bulgaria: Total population



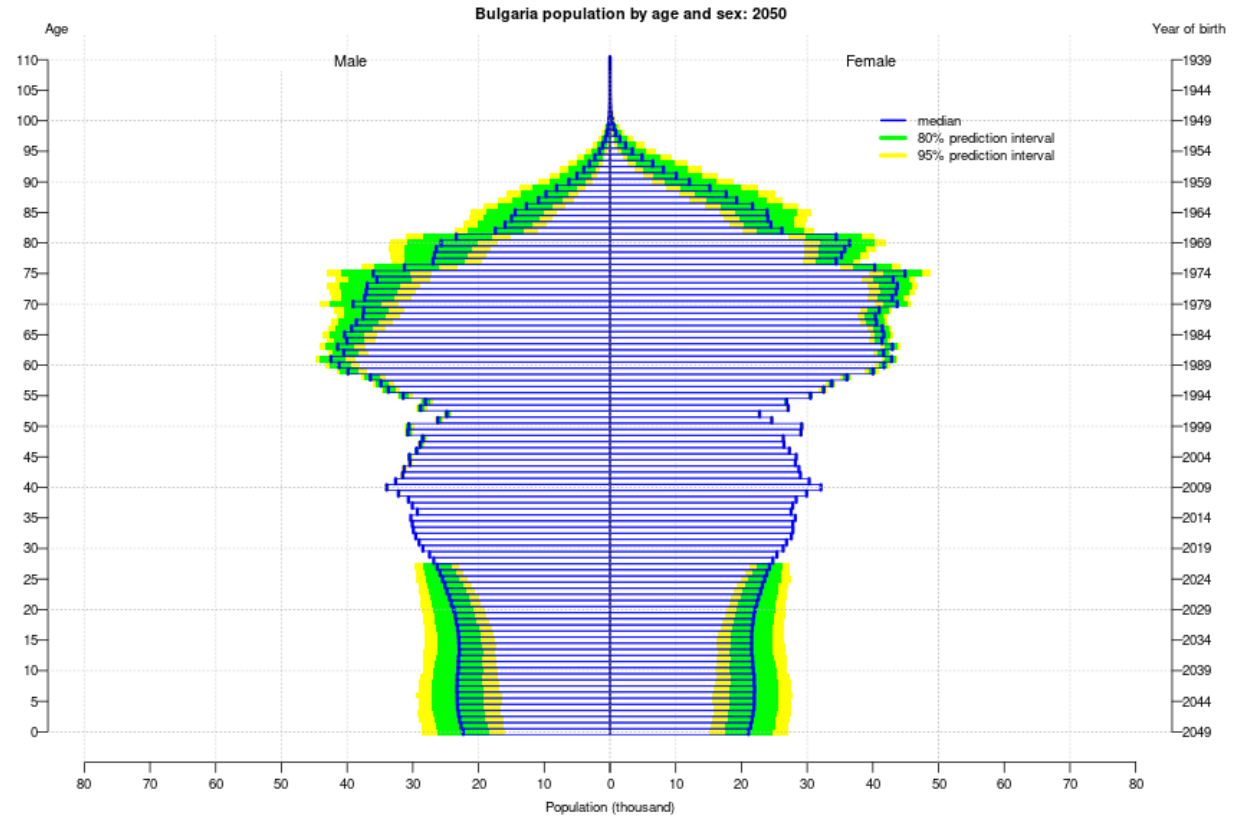
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# Bulgaria – fertility and population decline



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# Conclusions from the experiences of fertility transition

- Global experience of fertility decline as part of the demographic transition
  - the timing and speed and relative importance of specific determinants of fertility decline vary
- The continuing high levels of fertility that drive rapid population growth are both a symptom and a cause of slow progress in development
  - rapidly growing numbers of children and youth in low-income countries can hamper progress towards ensuring education, healthy lives and well-being for all
  - Once fertility declines, the age structures with high proportion of population in working age can be favorable for economic growth (“demographic dividend”)
- Advancing gender equality, expanding opportunities for education and employment contribute to the decline of fertility by changing incentives and intentions around having children, and also reducing child marriage and early childbearing
- Enabling individuals and couples to better realize their fertility intentions reduces the number of unintended pregnancies and often leads to further declines in fertility

# Conclusions for policy consideration in low fertility countries

- Global experience of low fertility, not limited to some parts of the world
  - Differences in how long is the experience of low fertility and at what level (below 1.2 or around 1.6)
  - No experience of TFR increasing back to sustained levels of 2 children per woman
  - Sustained low fertility rates do not necessarily mean declining population, depending on mortality and migration trends
  - Youthful age structure of population (“population momentum”) can keep population growing for several decades
- Great interest from low-fertility countries outside of EU in what kind of policy approaches work well
- Think about global principles for local implementation of policies that support environment for individuals and families to have children and when they want to have them
- Reproductive health care services, information and education & reproductive rights