

What is Demography?

Demography is the study of human populations – their size, composition and distribution across place – and the process through which populations change. Births, deaths and migration are the ‘big three’ of demography, jointly producing population stability or change. A population’s composition may be described in terms of basic demographic features – age, sex, family and household status – and by features of the population’s social and economic context – ethnicity, religion, language, education, occupation, income and wealth. The distribution of populations can be defined at multiple levels (local, regional, national, global) and with different types of boundaries (political, economic, geographic). Demography is a central component of societal contexts and social change.

What demographers do goes well beyond this broad definition and draws extensively from related disciplines – sociology, economics, statistics, history, political science, anthropology, psychology, public health and environmental sciences. A sampling of topics from the 2006 European Population Conference illustrates demography’s breadth:

- Demographic change and the family
- Integration processes of migrant populations
- Health inequalities at older ages
- Population and the welfare state
- Parenting and child care
- Reproductive health and abortion
- Ageing and the economy
- Religion and demographic behavior
- Population, development and environment
- Population projections of small areas and special groups
- Value changes and family formation

Demography is also very useful for understanding social and economic problems and identifying potential solutions. Demographers are engaged in social planning, market research, insurance forecasting, labor market analysis, economic development and so on. They work for private firms and public agencies at local, regional, national and international levels.

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