2022 Liberia Population and Housing Census

Policy Brief on
Population projections

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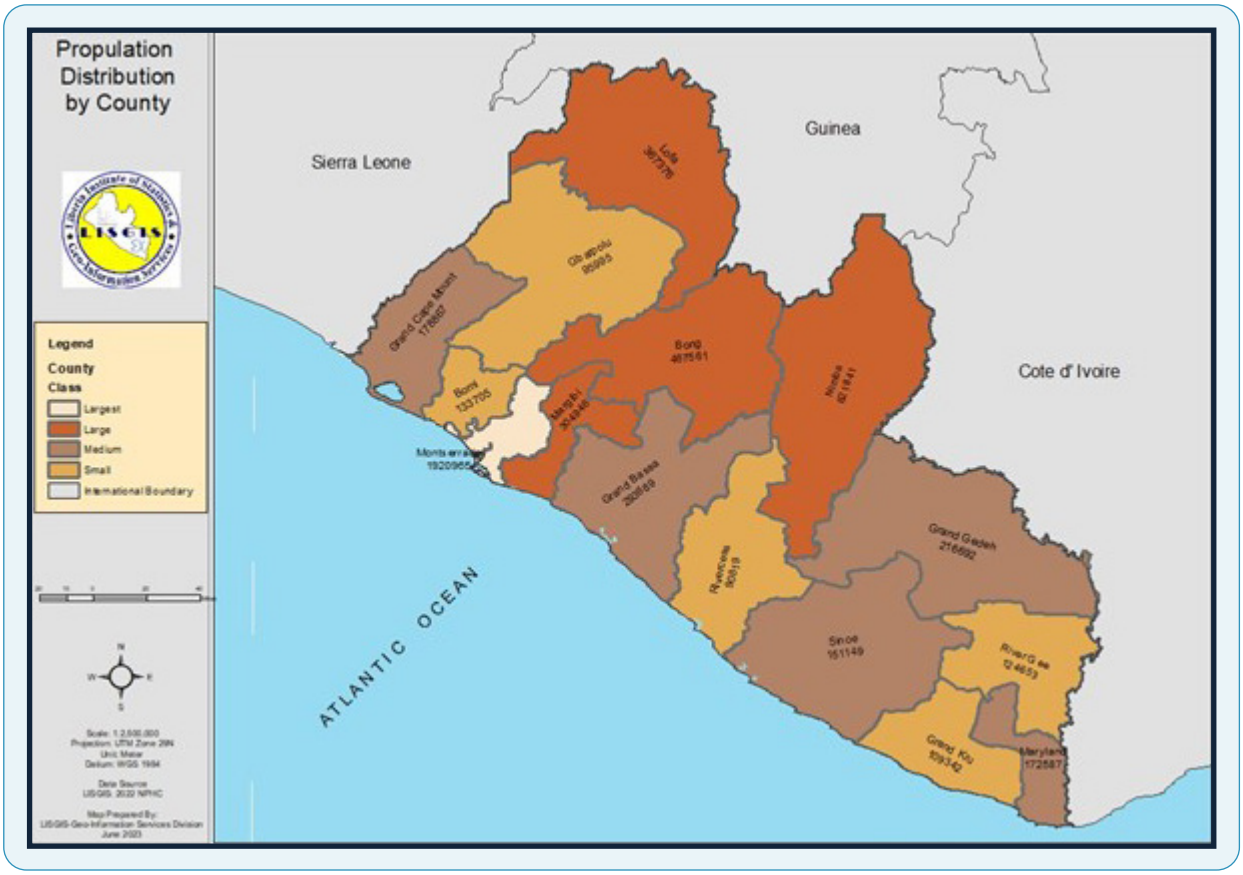
Administrative map of Liberia

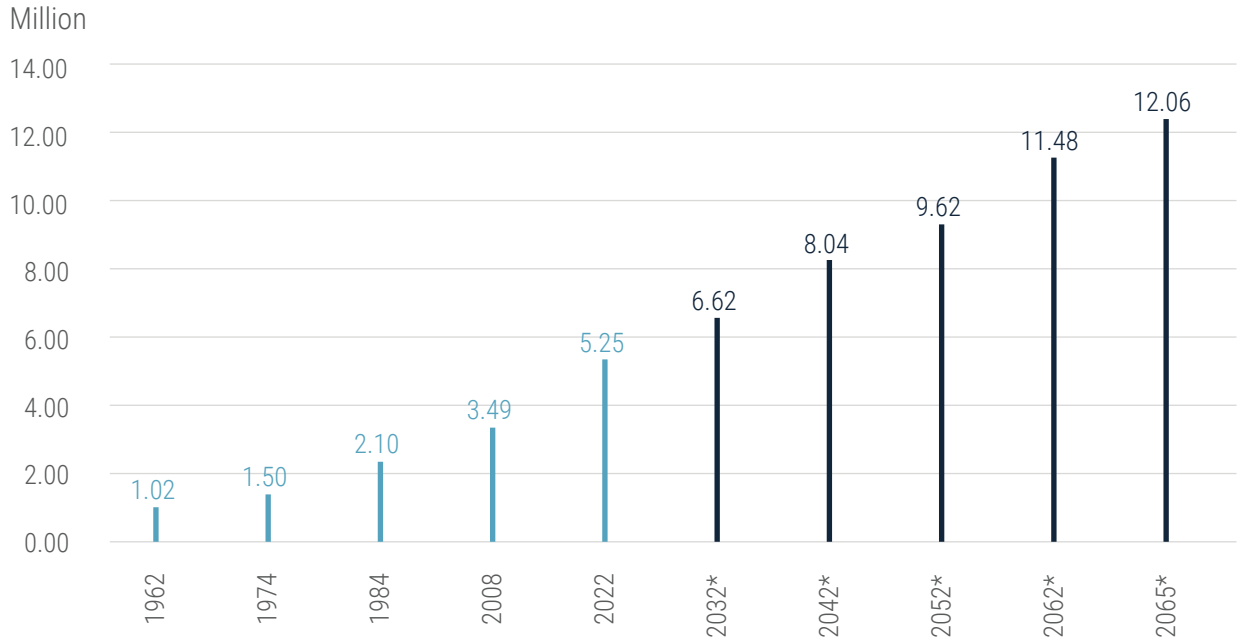


Key findings

The past and future population size and growth of Liberia

The population of Liberia in 1962 was just 1.02 million and it doubled in 1984 (2.10 million), before reaching a peak of 5.25 million in 2022. This means that within a period of six decades (1962-2022), the population has increased more than five folds (5.15 times). Between 2022 and the next decade (2032), the population is expected to increase by 1.37 million. The population is projected to grow to 11.48 million in 1962 and 12.05 million by 2065. The steady increase in the population size is due to the youthful nature of the population and the high fertility rates among women in the reproductive age group. This population growth will continue for some decades because the momentum which may tend to put pressure on governments, especially, catering for the under 18 years and the youth population.

Figure 1: Actual and projected population, 1962–2065



Note: * means projected population

Implications

The population of Liberia is expected to increase from about 5.3 million people today to 12.1 million people by 2065. This rapid growth is driven by a high fertility rate of 3.0 births per woman and a youthful population. A larger population increases the demand for goods and services, which can strain the economy. There will be more competition for jobs, potentially leading to lower wages and higher unemployment rates. The healthcare system may struggle to meet the growing demand for services, leading to potential shortages in medical supplies and personnel. High fertility rates and a young population mean that maternal and child health services need to be prioritized to reduce mortality rates and improve overall health outcomes.

The intercensal population growth rate of 3.0 in 2022 is higher than the average rate in Sub-Saharan Africa (2.5 per cent) as well as neighbouring countries such Côte d'Ivoire (2.5 per cent), Guinea (2.3 per cent), Sierra Leone (2.1 per cent) and Ghana (1.9 per cent).

Table 1: Percentage change, annual intercensal growth rate and doubling time

Period	Percentage change	Annual Intercensal Growth Rate	Doubling time
1962-1974	47.9	3.3	21
1974-1984	39.8	3.4	21
1984-2008	66.0	2.1	34
2008-2022	50.5	3.0	25
2022-2032	26.1	2.3	30
2032-2042	21.8	2.0	35
2042-2052	19.3	1.8	39
2052-2062	19.4	1.8	39

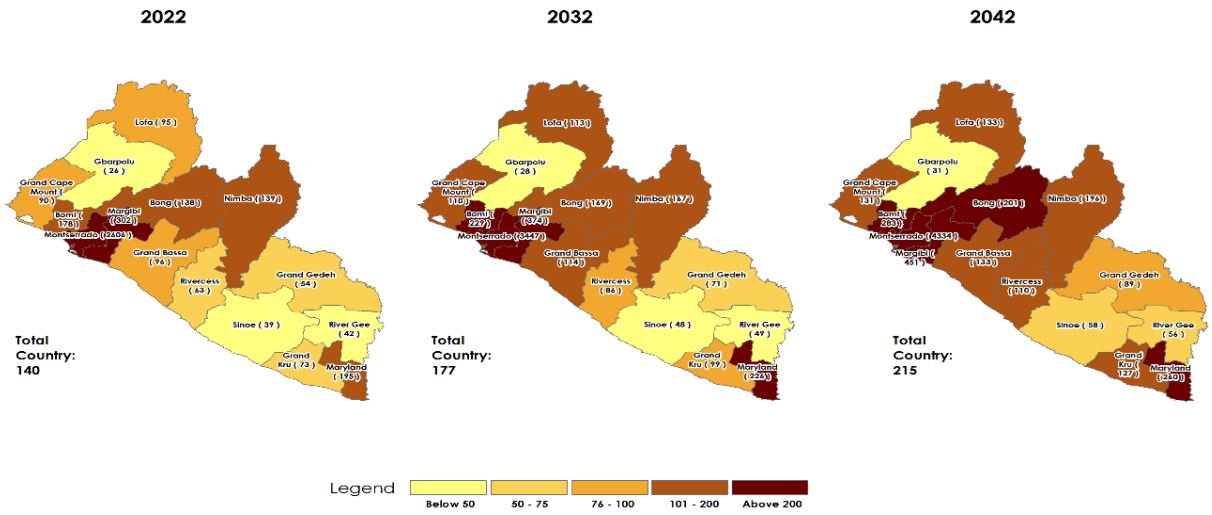
A higher population growth rate of Liberia indicates a rapidly growing population, which can lead to increase in demand for resources, infrastructure and services. A faster-growing population can intensify development challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Population density

Liberia's population density of approximately 140 persons per square mile in 2022 reflects a relatively low overall density. Rural areas contribute to this lower density, as they are less densely populated compared to urban centers. The projected increase to 177 persons per square mile in 2032 and 215 persons per square mile in 2042 indicates population growth. Urbanization, especially in cities like Monrovia, plays a crucial role in this upward trend

At the county level, Montserrado County (2,606 persons ml2) recorded the highest population density in 2022, followed by Margibi (302 persons ml2) and Maryland (195 persons ml2). It is expected that the population density of Montserrado will continue to increase at a faster rate – 3,447 persons per ml2 in 2032 and further increase to 4,334 persons per ml2 in 2042. Gbarpolu (23 persons ml2), Sinoe (39 persons ml2) and River Gee (42 persons ml2) are the most sparsely populated counties. The low population densities of these counties reflect the rural and often remote nature of these areas.

Figure 2: Population density by county – 2022, 2032 and 2042

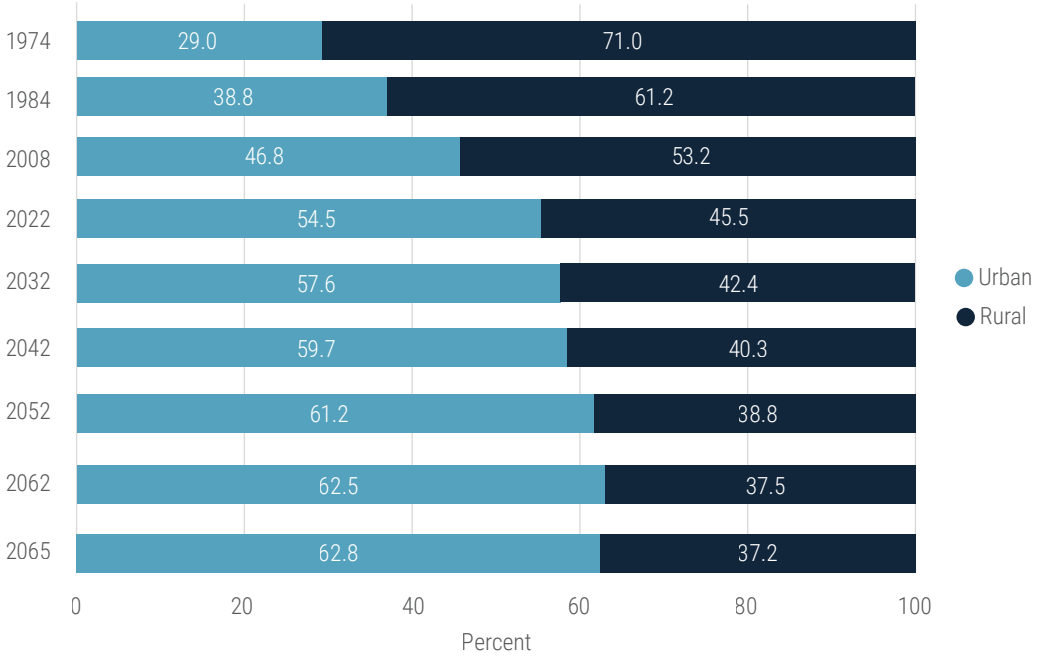


The higher population density can put strain resources such as water, sanitation and healthcare. In urban areas, they may face housing shortages and environmental stress. A growing and high-density areas such as Monrovia and other cities may need robust infrastructure to support their growing populations.

Urban and rural populations

The share of urban population in Liberia has nearly doubled, increasing by approximately 1.9 times from 29.0 per cent in 1974 to 54.5 per cent in 2022. This growth highlights a rapid urbanization trend in the country. The urban population is also projected to continue increasing in 2032 (57.6 per cent) to a peak in 2065, where more than 6 in 10 (62.5 per cent) of the population will live in urban areas. In contrast, rural population fell from 71.0 per cent in 1974 to 45.5 per cent in 2022, and is expected drop to a low of 37.2 per cent in 2065, reflecting the ongoing trend of urbanization.

Figure 3: Urban and rural population share, 1974–2065

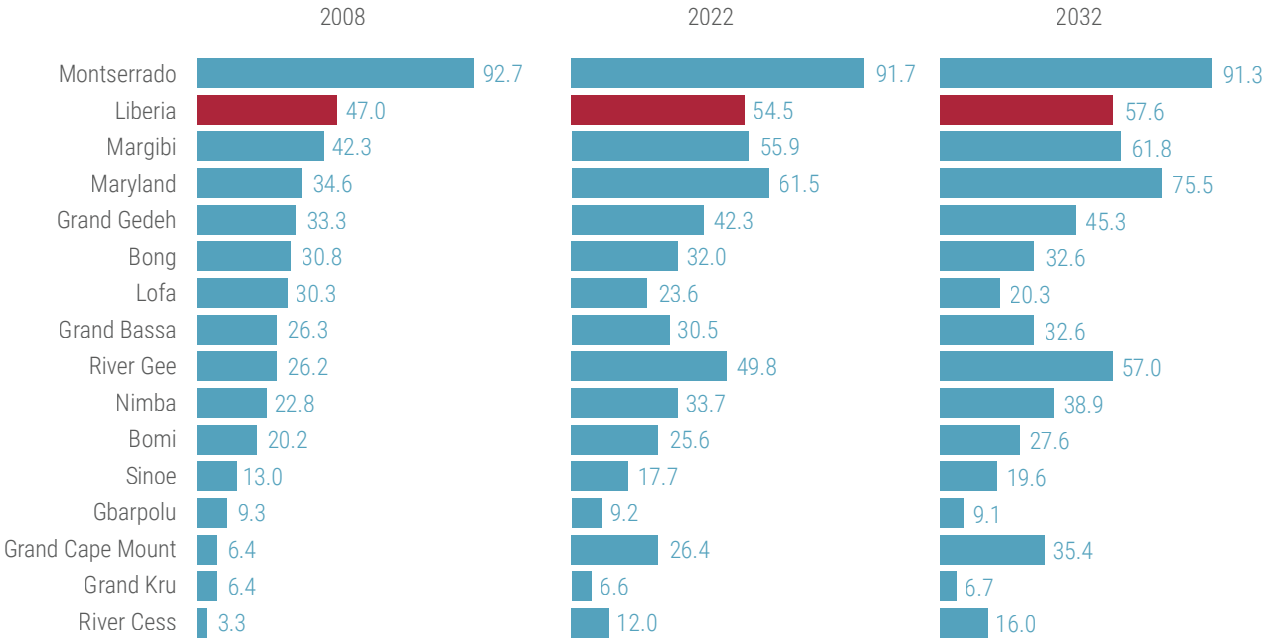


As more people move to urban areas, there is a need for increased investment in transportation, housing and utilities. Urban areas will require enhanced social services to support the growing population, including waste management, water supply and sanitation.

Variations in urban population across counties

Montserrado County is the most urbanized county, with the proportion of the population living in urban areas being over 90 per cent between 2008 and 2022 with a significant concentration of economic activities, infrastructure and services. More than nine in ten (91.3 per cent) of the population are expective to leave in urban areas by 2032. In 2008, Margibi had the second proportion of the population in urban areas but was overtaken by Maryland (61.5 per cent) in 2022. The county with the least share of urban population is River Cess, and its economy is largely based on agriculture, with limited infrastructural developments (roads, schools, healthcare).

Figure 4: Trends in urban growth by county - 2008, 2022 and 2032

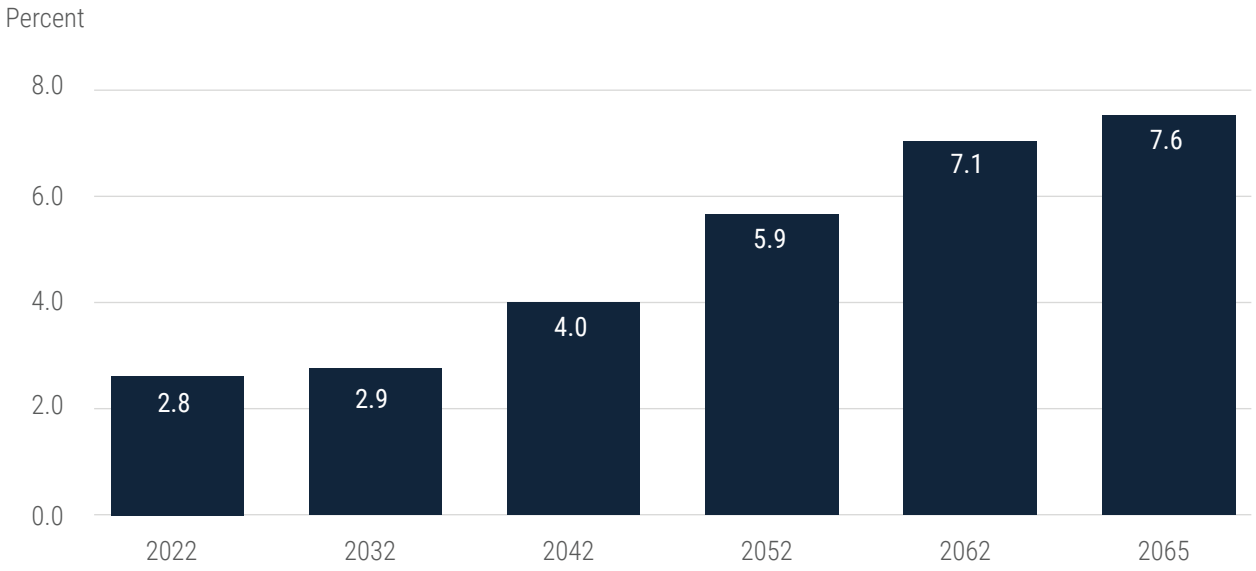


Counties with higher urban population such as Montserrado, Margibi, Maryland and River Gee require significant resource allocation for infrastructure, services and development. Urban areas attract businesses, creating employment opportunities. In densely populated areas, it will also require the population to have access to healthcare, education and sanitation.

Elderly population

The proportion of the population 65 years and older (elderly) is a common measure of ageing. It is projected that the elderly population in Liberia will increase from 2.8 per cent in 2022 to 4.0 in 2042, and to further increase to 7.6 per cent by 2065. The increase in the elderly population is due to improvements in social services and healthcare delivery which have significantly increased life expectancy. It is important for policy planning to consider these demographic shifts to ensure that the needs of the ageing population are met.

Figure 5: Projected elderly population 65 years and older, 2022 to 2065

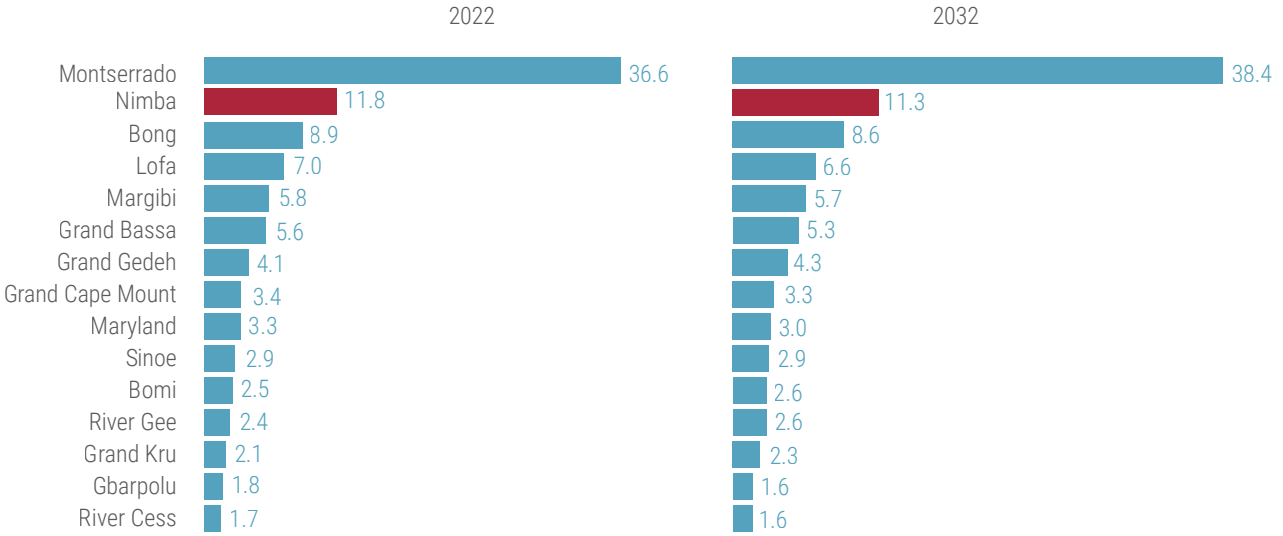


The needs of an increasing ageing population will go unmet, if robust healthcare infrastructure is not established, leading to poor health outcomes. Elderly citizens will face increased isolation and vulnerability if they do not receive adequate social programmes, community engagement and caregiver support. Without sustainable pension systems, the financial security of retirees will be jeopardized, causing widespread economic hardship.

County population distribution

The population distribution across counties in Liberia provides useful insights for the purposes of planning and development. Montserrado County is the most populous county, and it is projected to increase from 36.6 per cent in 2022 to 38.4 per cent by 2032. Nimba is the second most populous county in Liberia, accounting for 11.8 per cent in 2022 and it is projected have a population share of 11.3 per cent by 2032. River Cess, Gbarpolu and Grand Kru and the counties with the least population. These counties are relatively isolated with limited transportation facilities, rendering less accessible for settlement and job avenues, compared to more populous areas such as Montserrado and Nimba.

Figure 6: Population distribution by county, 2022 and 2032



The high concentration of population in Montserrado County (38.4 per cent by 2032) may lead to increased pressure on infrastructure, services and resources. Such situations may also lead to higher demand for housing, healthcare, education and employment opportunities, as well as the potential strain on local government resources and services.

The low population and isolation of River Cess, Gbarpolu and Grand Kru counties may result in limited access to basic services, healthcare and education. It will lead to increased vulnerability to natural disasters and crises due to limited resources and infrastructure. The disparities in population distribution and accessibility may worsen county inequalities and uneven development.

Policy recommendations

Developing sustainable urban planning strategies to manage the influx of people into cities and ensure adequate provision of infrastructure and services. Investment in urban planning, infrastructure and the provision of basic services such as sanitation, electricity and water. There is also the need for rural development programmes and agricultural mechanism to be initiated as a way of addressing the root cause of urban-rural migration.

To curb the rapid population growth, it is important to intensify family planning programmes. Implementing effective family planning programmes can help manage fertility rates and slow population growth. Prioritizing investment in education and healthcare infrastructure to ensure these systems can support a larger population.

Implement economic policies that promote job creation, support small and medium-sized enterprises, and absorb the growing workforce, thereby reducing poverty and inequality. Develop internal growth pole policies at the county level to stimulate local economic growth, promote regional development and ensure inclusive prosperity.