

The India Aging Report 2023

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Introduction:

The UNFPA recently released the India Aging Report, 2023. It declares that “globally, there are 1.1 billion persons aged 60 years and above in 2022, comprising 13.9 per cent of the total population of 7.9 billion.

The 2019 UNFPA report findings:

1. It noted that by 2027 India will have the highest population increase, overtaking China as the world’s most populous country. India did, in fact, overtake China as the most populous country this year.
2. The report predicts that between now and 2050, India, along with Nigeria, Pakistan, Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Indonesia, Egypt and the United States, will show the highest increase in population and will make up over half the world’s population.
3. Further, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa will double by 2050.
4. But, the rest of the world presents a very different picture.
 - The world is greying faster than ever.
 - David Bloom, writing for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2020, observed, “greying” is the dominant trend in the 21st century.
 - According to him, “this is a cumulative result of increasing longevity, declining fertility and the progression of larger cohorts to older ages.”
 - Three decades ago, in the 1970s, “the world was populated by more than three times as many adolescents and young adults (15 to 24-year-olds) than older people.” By 2050, these age groups will be “on par”.

India’s case:

1. The UNFPA recently released the India Aging Report, 2023.
2. It declares that “globally, there are 1.1 billion persons aged 60 years and above in 2022, comprising 13.9 per cent of the total population of 7.9 billion.
3. Over the next three decades, the number of older persons worldwide is expected to double to 2.1 billion by 2050, with the share rising to 22 per cent of the total population.
4. In 2022, there were 149 million persons aged 60 years and above in India, comprising about 10.5 per cent of the country’s population.
5. By 2050, the share of older persons will double to 20.8 per cent, with the absolute number at 347 million.”
6. The report points out that “the unprecedented rise in the ageing population will have significant implications for health, economy and society in India”.

Different Challenges of ‘aging populations’ for the developed and developing countries:

1. The UNFPA sets out the challenge of declining fertility rates that developed and developing countries will experience at different points in time.
2. The report points out that developing countries are presently witnessing a significant drop in fertility levels far sooner in their development journey than developed countries did.
3. Most of the developed world had much higher per capita income levels when their populations began to age, which made it easier for them to handle the economic pressures caused by ageing populations.
4. Developed countries, in other words, had a far bigger economic pie that they could use to sustain their elderly people when their populations began to age rapidly.
5. Countries like India do not enjoy that luxury.
6. The UNFPA sets out, through an array of statistics, that in some developing countries the old age dependency ratio could "more than double in 50 years, while it took about 150 to 200 years for the same thing to happen in the developed world."
7. The report has estimated that India's elderly population (people over 60 years) will grow at a rapid 41 per cent between 2021 and 2031.
8. It further notes that the number of elderly people will be larger than the number of children (those below 15 years) by 2046.
9. Ageing populations mean fewer workers, fewer taxpayers and hence, a reduction in a country's ability to generate wealth. It also means enhanced burdens on healthcare systems.

Peculiar case of China and USA:

1. A study on the population decline, published in Lancet in 2020, throws up some important findings about how population is intertwined with politics.
2. China is expected to replace the United States by 2035 in terms of the largest total gross domestic product (GDP).
3. However, the rapid decline in China's population means that the United States will reclaim the top position soon since its population will grow consistently if sustained by liberal immigration policies.
4. China, led by Xi Jinping, is trying to reverse its population decline by suggesting that women stay home from work and have babies.

Lancet's observation on population and geo-politics:

1. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of Lancet, makes two important points based on his research.
2. First, that "by the end of this century, the world will be multipolar, with India, Nigeria, China and the US as the dominant powers," buttressed in great part by their working age populations.
3. Second, that "immigration and strong reproductive and sexual rights for women will be key as the world will undergo radical shifts in geopolitical power."
4. He argues that soon the influence of both Europe and Asia will decline.
5. By 2100, most of the fastest shrinking populations will be in Asia and Europe.
6. For instance, China will decline from 1.4 billion in 2017 to 732 million people in 2100, Thailand from 71 million to 35 million, Italy from 61 million to 31 million and Japan from 128 million to 60 million.

Conclusion:

By the turn of the century, India will have declined in numbers and will have a substantial senior citizen composition. It must be prepared. It must enlarge its economic pie so that the large

dependent population would not become a burden on the earning population.

Dr. Shivakumar's



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