



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

PRESS RELEASE

India to overtake China as world's most populous country in April 2023, United Nations projects

New York, 24 April 2023 - China will soon cede its long-held status as the world's most populous country. By the end of this month, India's population is expected to reach 1,425,775,850 people, matching and then surpassing the population of mainland China. This forecast is based on the [latest United Nations estimates and projections of the global population](#).

China's population reached its peak size of 1.426 billion in 2022 and has started to fall. Projections indicate that the size of the Chinese population could drop below 1 billion before the end of the century. By contrast, India's population is expected to continue growing for several decades.

Fertility is a key driver of population trends

In 1971, China and India had nearly identical levels of total fertility, with just under six births per woman over a lifetime. Fertility in China fell sharply to fewer than three births per woman by the end of the 1970s. For India, it took three and a half decades to experience the same fertility reduction that occurred in China over a seven-year period during the 1970s.

In 2022, China had one of the world's lowest fertility rates (1.2 births per woman). India's current fertility rate (2.0 births per woman) is just below the "replacement" threshold of 2.1, the level required for population stabilization in the long run in the absence of migration.

During the second half of the 20th century, both countries made concerted efforts to curb rapid population growth through policies that targeted fertility levels. These policies, together with investments in human capital and gender equality, contributed to China's plummeting fertility rate in the 1970s and to the more gradual declines that followed in the 1980s and 1990s.

India also enacted policies to discourage the formation of large families and to slow population growth, including through its national family welfare programme beginning in the 1950s. India's lower human capital investment and slower economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s contributed to a more gradual fertility decline than in China.

Number of older persons is growing rapidly in both China and India

According to Policy Brief No. 153 from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), entitled “India overtakes China as the world’s most populous country”, between 2023 and 2050, the number of persons aged 65 or over is expected to nearly double in China and to increase by more than double in India.

Nevertheless, as a proportion of the total population, the growth of the older population in India will be much slower than in China.

In India, the number of adults of working age is projected to continue increasing both in number and as a proportion of the total population through mid-century, providing opportunities for faster economic growth over the next few decades. Meanwhile in China, projections indicate that the percentage of the population at ages 25-64 will peak in the coming years, closing the window of opportunity created by the changing age distribution.

Earlier this spring, UN DESA released the *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World*, examining the challenges and opportunities of population ageing for countries at different stages of the process.

Countries should protect and promote reproductive rights

Policies and programmes aimed at influencing fertility should ensure the basic human right of all individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly on the number and the timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so. Employment and social policies need to make it both possible and desirable for women to have children while remaining in the labour market and continuing to develop their careers. Such policies can include the provision of subsidized childcare, maternal and paternal leave, and tax credits, among others.

Countries should reduce their dependence on fossil-fuel energy

In the effort to combat climate change, it is essential that increasing incomes per capita in India and China do not undermine efforts towards more sustainable consumption and production.

All countries must urgently transition away from their current overdependence on fossil-fuel energy.

High quality data is essential for sustainable development

Considering future population trends in national development planning, informed by high-quality, timely and disaggregated data, is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Progress towards the Goals will be assessed using available data during the [SDG Summit 2023](#), to be convened by the United Nations General Assembly in September.

The UN recommends that a national census be taken at least once every 10 years. In China, the most recent census was taken in November 2020. India’s planned 2021 census was delayed due to challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and is now scheduled for 2024.

Due to the uncertainty associated with estimating and projecting populations, the specific date on which India is expected to surpass China in population size is approximate and subject to revision.

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