

A STABLE PLANET: ON WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS 2019 REPORT

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Demography of the World - Population Trends

The key message from the UN's *World Population Prospects 2019* report is that national leaders must redouble their efforts to raise education, health and living standards for people everywhere. [India is projected to become the most populous country by 2027](#) surpassing China, and host 1.64 billion people by 2050; the world as a whole could be home to 8.5 billion people in just over a decade from now, and the number could go up to 9.7 billion by mid-century. The projections should be viewed in perspective, considering that alarmist Malthusian fears of inability to provide for more than a billion people on earth did not come true. Yet, there are strong arguments in favour of stabilising population numbers by raising the quality of life of people, and achieving sustainable development that will not destroy the environment. The UN report shows migration to countries with a falling ratio of working-age people to those above 65 will be steady, as those economies open up to workers to sustain economic production. Japan has the lowest such ratio, followed by Europe and the Caribbean; in over three decades, North America, Eastern and Southeastern Asia will join this group. India meanwhile will have a vast number of young people and insufficient natural resources left for exploitation. Preparing for the changes and opportunities migration offers will depend on a skills revolution.

At the national level, achieving a reduction in fertility rates in States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh — which are high as per Sample Registration System data — is a challenge for India as it seeks to stabilise population growth. This is possible if the State governments set their minds to it. They must singularly focus on improving education and health access for women, both of which will help them be gainfully employed. On the other hand, a rise in life expectancy has brought with it a policy imperative that is bound to become even more important in coming decades. A growing population of older adults is a certainty, and it opens up prospects for employment in many new services catering to them. Urban facilities have to be reimagined, with an emphasis on access to good, affordable housing and mobility. The Sustainable Development Goals framework provides a roadmap to this new era. But progress in poverty reduction, greater equality, better nutrition, universal education and health care, needs state support and strong civil society institutions. Making agriculture remunerative and keeping food prices stable are crucial to ensure nutrition for all. India is set to become the most populous nation. For its leaders, improving the quality of life for its people will be a test of political will.

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As Prime Minister Modi returns to power, he must swear by the Indian civilisational ethos

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