

China's population drops for first time in 60 years

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In news— China's National Bureau of Statistics said that its population fell by roughly 850,000 in 2022, its first drop in six decades, bringing its population to around 1.41 billion at the end of 2022.

Key updates-

- According to the Chinese government, 9.56 million people were born in China in 2022, while 10.41 million people died.
- The drop, the worst since 1961, also makes it more probable that India will become the world's most populous nation this year.
- The year 1961 was the last of China's Great Famine, a result of Mao Zedong's large-scale changes in state policies.
- China's birth rate last year was 6.77 births per 1,000 people, down from a rate of 7.52 births in 2021, and marking the lowest birth rate on record.
- **One cause behind the fall in numbers in China is the one-child policy imposed between 1980 and 2015**, limiting the number of children couples could have to one.
- China has said that the policy has helped prevent nearly 400 million births, but as the proportion of those in the working-age population began reducing, the policy became a matter of concern.
- The country's statistics bureau said **the working-age population between 16 and 59 years old totalled 875.56 million, accounting for 62.0% of the national population**, while those aged 65 accounting for 14.9% of the total.
- Men outnumbered women, reflecting the sex-selective

births that were carried out because of the preference for the male child.

- **High education costs and costs of living have put many people off having children**, even as a number of incentives have been announced by the government.
- **From 2016, all married couples were allowed to have a second child and in 2021**, China said it would allow couples to have three children.
- This is not unique to China, and countries such as Japan and South Korea, as well as others in Europe, are seeing similar trends.
- Measures such as flexing working hours for people parenting young children, work-from-home options and monetary incentives have also been announced.

India to become most populous in 2023

- **Both India and China, in the 20th century, were similar in terms of key indicators impacting population growth**, such as life expectancy (the number of years a person is expected to live on average), the Crude Death Rate (the number of deaths in a population per 1,000 people) and Total Fertility Rate or TFR (the number of children a woman, on average, is expected to bear in her lifetime).
- **Mortality falls with increased education levels, public health and vaccination programmes**, access to food and medical care, and provision of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. In both countries, this happened, **resulting in a net increase in population for many decades**.
- **The replacement rate is the number of children a woman is to have in order to at least replace the present generation in the future**.
- China's TFR, according to its 2020 Census, was 1.3 births per woman – marginally up from the 1.2 in the 2010 and 2000 censuses, but way below the replacement rate of 2.1.

- **While TFR is gradually declining in India too, more important is the working-age population. Its share in the overall population crossed 50% only in 2007 and will peak at 57% towards the mid-2030s.**
- **India, therefore, has a window of opportunity well into the 2040s for reaping its “demographic dividend”, like China did from the late 1980s to 2015, contingent upon the creation of meaningful employment opportunities for a young population.**