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Premium

India's demography at crossroads: Elderly may outnumber the youth

States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are projected to see a higher elderly population than the youth by 2036.

Written by [Aanchal Magazine](#) | New Delhi |

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The proportion of the population aged under 15 years is projected to decline. (Express file photo)

India's favourable demographic dividend is at an inflection point of sorts, with the population share of the youth starting to taper off even as the share of the elderly is expected to steadily surge during 2021-2036. The more populous states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which experienced a rise in proportion of youth population to total population till 2021, are expected to see a decline from hereon, according to the 'Youth in India 2022' report released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are projected to see a higher elderly population than the youth by 2036. "Bihar and Uttar Pradesh experienced a rise in proportion of youth population to total population till 2021 and then it is expected to start declining. These two states, along with Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, are projected to have over half (52 per cent) of the country's youth," the report said.

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Citing the findings from the Report of Technical Group on Population Projections, 2020, constituted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, this report said youth in the age group of 15-29 years comprise 27.2 per cent of the population for 2021, which is expected to decrease to 22.7 by 2036.

'YOUTH IN INDIA 2022' REPORT

State/Union Territory	% of youth in total population of State/UT		
	2021	2031	2036
Bihar	28.8	27.7	25.5
Himachal Pradesh	25.1	21.4	19.5
Kerala	22.1	20	19.2
Madhya Pradesh	27.7	25.3	24.7
Maharashtra	26.1	22.5	21
Rajasthan	28.7	25.8	24.6
Tamil Nadu	23.2	20.4	19.1
Uttar Pradesh	29.9	26.3	25.1
India	27.2	24.1	22.7

Source: Youth in India 2022 Report, MoSPI

Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, 2020

States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are projected to see a higher elderly population than the youth by 2036.

The proportion of the population aged under 15 years is projected to decline, the elderly in the population is expected to increase, the report said. "The youth population is expected to increase initially but will start to decline in the latter half of 2011-2036 period. The total youth population increased from 222.7 million in 1991 to 333.4 million in 2011 and is projected to reach 371.4 million by 2021 and, thereafter, decrease to 345.5 million by 2036," the report said.

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For Kerala, which saw the youth population peak earlier than other states, the elderly population share in total population has been projected at 16.5 per cent compared with 22.1 per cent of youth population in 2021. The share of elderly in total population (22.8 per cent) in Kerala is then projected to cross the share of youth (19.2 per cent) by 2036. Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are also projected to experience elderly population more than the youth by 2036, the report said.

A greater proportion of youth at present will result in a greater proportion of elderly in the population in future. "This will create a demand for better healthcare facilities and development of welfare schemes/programmes for elderly people," the report said.

Experts said the rise in the share of elderly population will put pressure on social security and public welfare systems and the next 4-5 years need to be utilised well to accelerate productive job creation. "We haven't utilised this period to create more productive employment to enhance savings and growth because that is what demographic dividend is all about. That window is closing. In the case of the southern states, where the share of the dependent population is predicted to increase, then it means how are you going to support the dependent population and what implications it will have on things like providing social security for the aged, pension and healthcare as longevity increases. That's the conversation that happens in advanced economies. The share of the elderly in the population starts rising as opposed to the young working age group. Given the fact that people are typically in informal employment that don't provide social security, then who is going to step in to provide social security that adds burden to the state. Those would be the kind of issues," Radhicka Kapoor, senior visiting fellow, ICRIER, said.

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Proportion of youth to the total population had increased from 26.6 per cent in 1991 to 27.9 per cent in 2016 and then projected to start a downward trend and to reach 22.7 per cent by year 2036. On the contrary, the proportion of elderly population to the total population has increased from 6.8 per cent in 1991 to 9.2 per cent in 2016 and is projected to reach 14.9 per cent in 2036.

“We should have seen expansion in manufacturing. We have missed it. We are still aspiring to increase our share of employment in manufacturing, which we need to continue doing because even for the people who are currently seeking employment and are in current labour force, when they are going to retire and the share of elderly starts rising in very populous states, then it will be like a ticking time bomb. In the next 4-5 years, if active labour market policies are adopted to accelerate productive job creation, then we can at least try to ensure that the situation doesn't worsen,” Kapoor added.

As per the 2022 edition of the United Nations' World Population Prospects (WPP), released on Monday, India is projected to surpass China as the world's most populous country in 2023. The report pointed out that a sustained drop in fertility has led to an increased concentration of the population at working ages (between 25 and 64 years) and this shift in the age distribution provides a time-bound opportunity for accelerated economic growth known as the “demographic dividend”.

The UN report, however, also noted that the population of older persons is increasing both in numbers and as a share of the total, with the share of the global population aged 65 years or above projected to rise from 10 per cent in 2022 to 16 per cent in 2050, warning countries with ageing populations to take steps to adapt public programmes to the growing proportion of older persons, including by improving the sustainability of social security and pension systems and by establishing universal health care and long-term care systems.



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