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India's Population Trends: Lancet

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Why in News

According to a recent analysis by the **Lancet**, India's population is forecasted to peak around 1.6 billion in 2048 from 1.38 billion in 2017. It will be followed by a **32% decline to around 1.09 billion in 2100.**

Key Points

- For the study, researchers used data from the **Global Burden of Disease Study 2017.**
 - The Global Burden of Disease Study is a **comprehensive regional and global assessment of mortality and disability** from major diseases, injuries and risk factors.
 - The study was **initiated in the 1990s** as a collaborative effort of hundreds of experts worldwide, including researchers at the **World Health Organization** (WHO), and the **World Bank**.
- **Hampered Economic Growth:** The study has predicted **dramatic declines in working-age populations** in countries such as **India and China**, which will **hamper economic growth and lead to shifts in global powers.**

- **India Specific Data:**

- **India in 2100** will be the **world's most populous country**.
- The number of **working-age adults** aged 20-64 in India is **projected to fall** from around 762 million in 2017 to around 578 million in 2100.

However, India has been forecasted to have the **largest working-age population in the world by 2100**.

- India is also expected to **surpass China's workforce population in the mid-2020s**, where the working-age population is estimated to decline from 950 million in 2017 to 357 million in 2100.
- From 2017 to 2100, India is **projected to rise up the rankings** of countries with the largest total **Gross Domestic Product** (GDP) globally from 7th to 3rd, in terms of nominal GDP.
- The country's **Total Fertility Rate** (TFR) declined to below 2.1 in 2019 (data taken from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017) and is projected to have a **continued steep fertility decline** until about 2040, reaching a TFR of 1.29 in 2100.

TFR indicates the **average number of children expected to be born to a woman** during her reproductive span of 15-49 years.

- India is also forecasted to have the **second-largest net immigration in 2100**, with an estimated half a million more people immigrating to India in 2100 than emigrating out.

Given the trends of countries like the **USA banning work visas** and India being a developing country, has the **potential to offer a huge manufacturing market** to immigrants who want to work here.

- **Global Data:**

- The world population is forecasted to **peak at around 9.7 billion people in 2064 and fall to 8.8 billion by the century's end**, with 23 countries seeing populations shrink by more than 50%, including Japan, Thailand, Italy and Spain.
- By 2100, a total of 183 out of 195 countries will have TFR below the **replacement level** of 2.1 births per woman. The **global TFR is predicted to steadily decline** from 2.37 in 2017 to 1.66 in 2100, well below the minimum rate of 2.1.

Replacement level fertility is the number of children needed to replace the parents, after accounting for fatalities, skewed sex ratio, infant mortality, etc. The population **starts falling below this level**.

- **Huge shifts in the global age structure**, with an estimated 2.37 billion individuals over 65 years globally in 2100 compared with the 703 million in 2019.

Challenges

- The new population forecasts are in contrast with projects of “continuing” global growth by the **United Nations Population Division** (UNPD).
- They highlight **huge challenges** to the economic growth of a **shrinking workforce**, the **high burden on health** and **social support systems of an ageing population**.
 - As countries move toward prioritising development, fertility reduction is inevitable.
 - At the same time, improved survival at all ages, especially at the older ages, would lead to the rapid ageing of the population.

Suggestions

- **Liberal migration policies** could be adopted as a temporary solution for economic growth in the context of declining working population.
 - Migrants **contribute significantly** to labour-market flexibility, innovation and technological progress, boost the working-age population and bring new skills contributing to the human capital development of receiving countries.
- It is more important to look for possibilities of **investing in technological advancements that can compensate for human shortages**.
- The **effect of fertility decline** on women’s reproductive health rights has to be **accompanied by greater economic independence** which would allow women to negotiate with the system on their own terms and for better support services as well.

Way Forward

- India is on the right side of demographic transition that provides golden opportunity for its rapid socio-economic development, if policymakers align the developmental policies with this shift.
- This demographic transition or shift also brings complex challenges with it. If the increased workforce is not sufficiently skilled, educated and provided gainful employment, India would be facing demographic disaster instead.
- To reap the benefits of the shift, proper investment in human capital is needed by focussing on education, skill development and healthcare facilities.
- By learning from global approaches from countries such as Japan and Korea and designing solutions considering the domestic complexities, India would be able to reap the benefits.

Source: IE