

Pakistan's population boom: shaping a future powerhouse

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The world is on the cusp of experiencing momentous demographic shifts, with Pakistan poised to play a pivotal role in this transformation. Pakistan is expected to rise from the fifth most populous country to the third most populous country.

According to the UN's latest World Population Prospects report published in 2024, Pakistan's population is expected to rapidly grow from

247.5 million in 2023 to a projected 511 million by 2100, profoundly impacting the wider region and the world.

This dramatic growth stands in stark contrast with regional and global trends. While most nations, including Pakistan's neighbors, will see their populations peak and decline within the coming decades, Pakistan's population will keep growing well beyond the end of the century.

Despite a gradually decelerating growth rate, Pakistan will experience one of the largest absolute population increases globally, positioning it as a demographic outlier and a future regional powerhouse.

The divergence can be glimpsed from the country's Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which at 3.61 is well above the replacement rate of 2.1. This is striking given that Pakistan's TFR is among the highest in the world outside Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, except for Afghanistan, every neighboring country already has a fertility rate at or below the replacement level.

Pakistan's TFR isn't projected to fall below replacement until 2080; even by 2100, Pakistan's TFR at 1.93 will be among the highest in the world. This resilience means that Pakistan will avoid the negative impact of population decline affecting all its neighbors except Afghanistan.

Consequently, due to the relatively high fertility rates, Pakistan will continue to have a sizable share of its population below the age of 25. In 2023, Pakistan had 140.5 million people aged between 0-24, the fourth-largest youth population globally.

While countries in Pakistan's neighborhood, including China, India, Bangladesh, and Iran, have all seen their youth population consistently decline since 2014, Pakistan's youth population will only peak in 2069 at 178.70 million, then slightly decline to 165.8 million by 2100. From 2023 to 2100, Pakistan will see an overall increase of 15% in youth, helping it

maintain a significant youth bulge with the third-largest youth population globally.

Conversely, its neighbors – and much of the world – will experience steep declines of over 60% in the under-25 populations, ushering in an era of youth scarcity.

Inevitably, the expansion of the youth cohort in Pakistan will lead to a dramatic rise in its prime working-age population aged between 25 to 64. From 2023 to 2100, the share of working-age adults as a percentage of the total population will rise from 39% to 51% of the total population.

In fact, over the same period, the number of working-age individuals will more than double, from 96.3 million to 260.4 million, with Pakistan experiencing the highest gain in working-age population in the world outside of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria.

By 2060, while other countries in the region and across the world like Bangladesh, India, and Iran will have declining workforces, Pakistan's working-age population will close in and surpass China's by 2100. Given that Pakistan will go from having the 6th largest working-age population to having the 2nd highest working-age population after India by 2100, it has a unique opportunity to leverage its workforce to unlock economic prosperity.

The dependency ratio, which measures the ratio of dependents (young and old) to the working-age population, will benefit Pakistan's burgeoning workforce favorably. While most countries, both regionally and globally, are expected to see higher dependency ratios due to aging populations, Pakistan will be among the few countries outside Sub-Saharan Africa experiencing a decline by 2100.

This lowered dependency ratio could alleviate pressure on the working-age population, making it easier for Pakistan to support its dependents and invest in economic growth.

In addition to the changes experienced in the youth and workforce, Pakistan will also experience a rise in its aging population, albeit at a considerably slower pace as opposed to its neighbors and much of the world.

In 2023, while Pakistan already had the lowest elderly population regionally at 4%, it is expected to see it marginally rise only to 6% by 2050, when all of its neighbors except Afghanistan will be “aged”, with 14% or more of their populations above 65. Between 2050 and 2100, and especially after 2064, when the number of elderly is expected to cross the number of young children under the age of 5, Pakistan’s elderly population will grow more rapidly.

Although by 2100, Pakistan will become an aged nation, with 17% of its population 65 and above, it will still fare better than its neighbors, Pakistan will fare better, as countries like India, Bangladesh, Iran will have nearly one-third or more of their populations above 65, becoming “super-aged”.

Given that Pakistan’s working-age population is set to grow until the end of the century, migration will play a crucial role in the country’s future. Pakistan already has the highest negative net migration in the world, with 1.6 million more people leaving the country than entering in 2023, a position that it is expected to retain over the next 76 years.

While this presents challenges, especially in terms of brain drain, it simultaneously offers immense opportunity to harness the potential of Pakistan’s ever-expanding diaspora. Targeted investments in the diaspora could serve as critical components of Pakistan’s economic strategy, propelling growth and development.

As Pakistan's population surges, it will become one of the most densely populated nations in the world, intensifying pressures on water, land, and other resources. Sustainable resource management will become critical to maintaining living standards. To fully realize its demographic potential, Pakistan must invest strategically in education, workforce development, and infrastructure.

With the under-25 population expected to outnumber the working-age population until 2049, the next 25 years are critical for investing in education, childcare, and youth development while preparing for a booming workforce. Strategic investments in workforce training and female labor force participation are essential.

By the 2060s and 2070s, Pakistan should gradually begin reallocating some of its resources away from childcare to elderly care to cater to a growing elderly population.

As highlighted by PIDE's info graphic on Pakistan's population dynamics, while neighboring countries will see their populations peak by the late 2050s, with the global population declining after 2084, Pakistan will stand out as one of the few nations outside Sub-Saharan Africa with a steadily growing population. Thus, driven by its rapidly growing population, youthful demographics, and expanding working-age cohort, Pakistan is positioned to become a regional powerhouse.

As its neighbors and most countries across the world, struggle with the fallout from rapidly declining youth populations, stagnating workforces, and an exponential increase in their elderly populations, Pakistan's demographic boom offers it a distinct edge.

Provided the country invests in education, workforce development, and infrastructure to harness this demographic potential, this momentum will enhance Pakistan's influence in regional politics,

enabling it to negotiate favorable trade deals and assert a more significant role in global governance.

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