

How should countries prepare for the world's aging **population**? A United Nations report is urging countries to answer that question.

Japan has the world's oldest population. Thirty percent of Japanese are older adults. The UN report says by the middle of this century, sixty-four countries will have that level of the population over age sixty.

Jose Miguel Guzman is head of the UN's Population and Development Branch. He says people are living longer for many reasons. They include improved nutrition, medical developments, better health care, education and economic well-being. But he says the fact that more people are living longer can create problems.



The UN report says populations are aging in all parts of the world. The most-rapid age increases are in developing countries. In those countries, people live -- on average -- sixty-eight years. By twenty-fifty, the average person will live seventy-four years. **Life expectancy** is seventy-eight in developed countries. Children born today in developed countries can expect to live until the age of eighty-three.



Richard Blewett is chief executive officer of HelpAge International, a publication partner of the UN report. He says, in many countries, older people are not seen as helping the economy. He says sixty-seven percent of the older people who answered questions for the report said their biggest problem was **employment discrimination**. But he said some countries are beginning to see the advantages, or gains, of having older adults. For example, grandparents in rural China increasingly care for grandchildren as their parents move to cities to find jobs.

Other changes include reforming **social security systems** in developed countries. Another is creating social safety systems in developing nations where traditional family support systems are disappearing. The report says the most cost-effective and humane thing a society can do for its older citizens is to invest in their health so they can remain active.

Researchers are warning that aging populations present challenges for governments when economic productivity is falling.

Starting in the nineteen eighties, Asia's young, working-age population helped the area become an economic success. But things are changing.

Thailand's family planning efforts have led to much-smaller families. In the 1960's, mothers had an average of five to six children. Now, that number has fallen to one point five. That is well below the number of births needed to keep the population count unchanged.



China and India have used family planning programs to help reduce population growth. But researchers say such efforts will have harmful, long-term effects.

Parents choosing the sex of their children, and medical technology, have created large **gender gaps**. The UN Population Fund says there are one hundred seventeen million women "missing," mostly in China and India. The Fund has predicted that, by twenty-thirty, China and India will have fifty percent more men than women of **marriageable** age.

Wolfgang Lutz is with the Wittgenstein Center in Vienna, Austria. He says worldwide, progress has been made in balancing population growth with **fertility rates**.



The Asian Development Bank says education will help to solve the problem of an aging workforce. Better-educated and better-trained work forces can increase productivity, which leads to stronger economic growth.

The World Bank says a lack of good jobs for an increasing number of young people in Africa threatens the continent's recent economic growth. The Bank says economic development is important to success,



especially in areas south of the Sahara Desert.

Shanta Devarajan is the World Bank's Chief Economist for Africa. He says the number of young people entering the work force is one of the main reasons Africa's economic growth will continue.

"Africa may be the only source of young people very soon, because the rest of the world is aging and some of the world -- including Europe and, and Japan and the U.S. -- are aging quite rapidly. So this is potentially -- Africa could be a great powerhouse in the future."

Shanta Devarajan says a growing population of young people could threaten economic development if it is not controlled in the right way.

The World Bank says sales of natural resources can help developing countries, but they must be used to help improve the lives of average citizens. And good **governance** will help ensure that citizens, both rich and poor, can profit from such sales.

Quiz Questions

<p>Important Words to Know Let's review the meanings of key words found in the article</p> <p>population (<i>noun</i>): the whole number of people or inhabitants in a country or region life expectancy (<i>noun</i>): the amount of time an person is expected to live employment discrimination (<i>noun</i>): unfairly judging a person's skills as a worker social security system (<i>noun</i>): government care for people who cannot work gender gap (<i>noun</i>): imbalance between the number of males and females marriageable (<i>adjective</i>): able and allowed to get married fertility rate (<i>noun</i>): how often people have children governance (<i>noun</i>): the way that a city or country is controlled by the people who run it</p>
<p>The article is about the world's population getting older. What does the word "population" mean?</p> <p>a. all the buildings that exist in a region b. the typical weather of a region c. all of the people who live in a region d. the types of plants that grow in a region</p>
<p>The article states that life expectancy is seventy-eight in developed countries. What does the term "life expectancy" mean?</p> <p>a. how long a person might live b. how many friends a person has c. how a person reaches a goal d. how happy a person is</p>
<p>Drag each definition to its correct term.</p> <p>a. employment discrimination-unfairly judging a person's skills as a worker b. social security system-government care for people who cannot work c. gender gap-imbalance between the number of males and females</p>
<p>By the year 2030, China and India will have fifty percent more men than women of marriageable age. What does the word "marriageable" mean?</p> <p>a. the age when a woman can drink alcohol b. the age when a woman can have children c. the age when a woman can get married d. the age when a woman can leave home</p>
<p>Many countries are trying to balance population growth with fertility rates. What does the term "fertility rate" mean?</p> <p>a. how often people have children b. how many children attend school c. how many older people live alone d. how quickly children grow into adults</p>

What does the word "**governance**" mean?

- a. the number of people in a government
- b. the system used by people to vote in an election
- c. the type of money used in a country
- d. the way a country is controlled by the people running it

According to the article, which country has the world's oldest population?

- a. the United States
- b. India
- c. China
- d. Japan

From the list below, select all of the items that the article says are a result of people getting older around the world:

- a. smaller families
- b. family planning programs
- c. African youth becoming good source of workers
- d. fewer natural resources

Which of the regions listed below may become the leading source of young workers in the future?

- a. Asia
- b. Europe
- c. United States
- d. Africa