

Aging Trends and Patterns Throughout Asia: Now and in the Future

Wan He, Ph.D. and Loraine A. West, Ph.D.

U.S. Census Bureau

With rapid fertility declines in recent decades, Asia is experiencing accelerated population aging. Today Asians account for more than half of the world's older population (aged 65 and over). It is projected that by 2050 Japan will remain the oldest country in the world and South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan will overtake European countries to become the second, third, and fourth oldest, each with more than 30 percent of their population aged 65 and over. In addition, a number of Asian countries will see the percentage of their population aged 80 and over quadruple by 2050.

We first place Asian aging trends and patterns in a global context and then focus on the vast differences within the region. Younger countries, such as Kuwait and Yemen, have less than 3 percent of their total population being older. China and India also provide a sharp contrast. While India is projected to surpass China and become the most populous country by 2026, its older population share will be half that of China.

We also examine public pension systems in Asian countries and the potential impact of aging on the sustainability of these systems. Several Asian countries are among those with the highest life expectancy in the world, highlighting the importance of adequate resources to support the older population. Labor force participation rates among the older population have been declining in most Asian countries as development advances and pension eligibility ages remain relatively low. Aging trends will have implications for governments, businesses, families, and individuals as they prepare for the accelerated pace of demographic aging.