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UNFPA's State of World Population (SOWP) report.

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Why in News: The UNFPA's 'The State of World Population Report, 2023', titled '8 Billion Lives, Infinite Possibilities: The Case for Rights and Choices' released recently

Major Highlights of the report

India's population is 1,428.6 million while China's stood at 1,425.7 million, a difference of 2.9 million. According to the report's 2022 edition, India's population was 1406.6 million—again, with 68 per cent in the 15-64 age group.

Last year, China's population fell for the first time in six decades. Meanwhile, India's annual population growth has averaged 1.2 per cent since 2011, compared with 1.7 per cent in the 10 years previously, according to government data. The report also estimated that the global population will have hit 8.045 billion by the same date.

The UNFPA report said 25% of India's population is in the age group of 0-14, 18% in 10-19, 26% in the 10-24, 68% in 15-64, and 7% above 65.

The latest report also shows that India's total fertility rate (births per woman in the reproductive age) is estimated at 2.0.

The average life expectancy for an Indian male stands at 71 and for females at 74, states the report which has been published annually since 1978.

The report also states that 44 per cent of partnered women and girls in 68 reporting countries do not have the right to make informed decisions about their bodies when it comes to having sex, using contraception and seeking health care.

An estimated 257 million women worldwide have an unmet need for safe, reliable contraception, it states.

Key India insights

As part of the report, a public survey was commissioned by UNFPA and conducted by YouGov, that asked a representative sample of 7,797 people across eight countries—India, Brazil, Egypt, France, Hungary, Japan, Nigeria, and the United States—for their views on population issues.

For India, the total sample size was 1,007 and the survey was carried out online. The analysis has been weighted and is representative of a national urban sample of adults in India (aged 18+).

On identifying the population-related matters of greatest importance, 63 per cent of Indians identified various economic issues as the top concerns when thinking about population change.

It was followed by environmental concerns at 46 per cent, and sexual and reproductive health and rights and human rights concerns at 30 per cent.

Respondents in India held the opinion that the population in their country was too large and fertility rates too high. There was no significant difference between the views of men and women in India on national fertility rates.

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Other observation about India

India shows progress in education, public health and sanitation, economic development as well as technological advancements.

As the country with the largest youth cohort—its 254 million youth (15-24 years) can be a source of innovation, new thinking and lasting solutions.

The trajectory can leapfrog forward if women and girls, in particular, are equipped with equal educational and skill-building opportunities, access to technology and digital innovations, and most importantly with information and power to fully exercise their reproductive rights and choices

The report indicates that population anxieties are widespread and governments are increasingly adopting policies aimed at raising, lowering or maintaining fertility rates.

But efforts to influence fertility rates are very often ineffective and can erode women's rights. Women's bodies should not be held captive to population targets

To build thriving and inclusive societies, regardless of population size, India must radically rethink how we talk about and plan for population change. The report calls for a radical rethink of how population numbers are framed, urging politicians and media to abandon overblown narratives about population booms and busts.

Family planning must not be used as a tool for achieving fertility targets; for empowering individuals, she said. And women should be able to choose if, when and how many children they would like to have, free from the coercion of pundits and officials