

Study: China faces 'unstoppable' population decline by mid-century

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While China still boasts the world's largest population, social engineering looks to have precipitated an "unstoppable" decline, a recent study suggests.

(CNN)China will face an "unstoppable" population decline over the coming decades, with fewer and fewer workers struggling to support an

increasingly aging society, according to a report by a leading state-sponsored Chinese thinktank.

The report, which comes more than three years since China officially ended its controversial decades-long one-child policy, warns that the "the era of negative population growth is almost here," forecasting that the country's population will peak at 1.44 billion in 2029.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences report suggests that the decline in fertility rates will lead to a decrease in overall population to 1990-era levels of 1.172 billion by 2065. World Bank data from 2017 showed a Chinese population of 1.386 billion.

The country's working-age population has stagnated, the report states, while its dependency ratio -- the number of working people in relation to non-working, largely children and retired people -- continues to skew.

"In theory, long-term population decline, especially accompanied with the increasing escalation of aging of population, is bound to bring very negative social and economic consequences," the report states, without elaborating on what these consequences could entail.

Experts have warned that as China's working age population shrinks so too will domestic consumption, which could have unintended consequences for the global economy, which has relied on China as a growth engine.

The report says that the country should start preparing and crafting policy to meet the challenges of the impending decline.



Passengers gather in the waiting hall at Hongqiao Railway Station ahead of the Lunar New Year holidays in 2018. The country's population is expected to decline by almost 200 million by mid-century.

After decades of following a strict one-child policy, in 2015 Beijing announced that it would drop the controversial policy, which, for decades has been blamed for infanticide and forced sterilizations.

Under current family planning rules, the majority of Chinese couples are limited to two children, following the easing of the country's notorious policy, which was enacted in 2016.

However, the changes failed to produce a spike in the birth rate. In 2017, the country's total fertility rate was 1.6 children per woman, well below the 2.1 rate estimated to be necessary to keep the population steady.

The current, two-child restrictions look [set to be further relaxed](#) under a draft reform to the country's Civil Code, potentially allowing families to have multiple children for the first time in decades.

Despite the projected declines in the world's most populous nation, the United Nations expects the global population to continue to rise, albeit at a slowing rate.

A 2017 report from the world body estimated the 2017 number at 7.6 billion, which is expected to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion by the end of the century.

India, the world's second-largest country by inhabitants, is expected to overtake China as the world's most populous by 2024, according to that report.