

## **South Korea's Falling Population**

### **Why in news?**

For the first time in history, the number of deaths recorded in South Korea over the past year exceeded births, causing the country's population to decline.

### **What is the current scenario?**

- In 2020, around 3.07 lakh people died in South Korea, and only 2.75 lakh babies were born.
- The number of new births fell by 10% from 2019.
- At the end of 2020, the country's population was less by 20,838 from the year before.
- The growth rate of South Korea's population declined from 1.49% in 2010 to 0.05% by 2019.
- If this trend continues, the government predicts that the population will drop from the current 5.18 crore to 3.9 crore by 2067. Consequently, 46% of people will be above 64 years of age.

### **Why is South Korea's population declining?**

- In many parts of the world, greater economic development and lower fertility rates often go hand in hand.
- South Korea is a highly industrialised nation.
- It already has the world's lowest birth rate at 0.92 as of 2019; the number represents the average number of children a woman has.
- This figure is substantially lower than the fertility rate of 2.1 required for replacement of the existing population.
  - In India, the fertility rate is 2.2, as per 2019 figures.
- Some of the reasons believed to be behind the low birth rate include reluctance to opt for maternity leave.
- Another reason said is the high real estate prices, which dissuade young couples from buying a house and starting a family.

### **What is the government response?**

- South Korea's government has said that it would bring in "fundamental changes" to address this trend.

- In December 2020, President Moon Jae-in announced policies such as giving cash incentives for families.
  - The scheme, which starts in 2022, will provide a one-off payment of 2 million won (around Rs 1.35 lakh) for each child born, to help cover parental costs.
- Until the baby turns one, the government will pay an additional 300,000 won (around Rs 20,000) every month.
- After 2025, the incentive will be raised to 500,000 won (around Rs 34,000).

### **Is a dwindling population always undesirable?**

- Dwindling population has mixed effects.
- When the young population in a country declines, it creates labour shortages.
- This would have a major detrimental impact on the economy.
- More older people could also mean an increase in demands for healthcare and pensions.
- This further burdens the country's social spending system when fewer people are working and contributing to it.
- However, on the other hand, low birth rates can improve the standard of living in low-income countries.
- In such countries, fewer children being born would mean greater access to already deficient public services such as health and education.
- Also, many experts are dismissing the notion that more number of aged people would cause healthcare costs to shoot up.
- This is because, around the world, not just life expectancy, but "healthy life expectancy" has risen.
- This means that on average, people would be spending more years in good health than ever before.
- Another effect of a declining population is that it would provide an impetus to migration.
- With labour shortages in such countries, they would have to open up borders and allow more immigrants to come in and work.
- This, in turn, would cause their society to become more cosmopolitan.

### **What is the projection for world population?**

- In July 2020, a Lancet analysis said that the world population will peak at 973 crore people in 2064.
- It is said to decline from this peak to 879 crore in 2100.
- In India, the population is expected to reach a peak of 160 crore in 2048, up from 138 crore in 2017. It will decline by 32% to 109 crore in 2100.
- In the study, the global total fertility rate (TFR) is predicted to steadily decline from 2.37 in 2017 to 1.66 in 2100.

- The TFR is projected to fall below 2.1 in 183 countries.
- In 23 countries including Japan, Thailand, Italy and Spain, it is projected to shrink by more than 50%.
- In India, the TFR is projected to continue a steep decline until about 2040, reaching 1.29 in 2100.

**Source: The Indian Express**

