



## Japan's ageing — and declining — population

Japan has a population of about 127 million, the 10th largest in the world. However, the country's population is declining. Japan has approximately 27 million elderly people and a larger proportion of over-65s than any other country.

It also has the smallest proportion of people under the age of 15 (13.6%), which will result in huge difficulties for Japan in the future, as the number of people in work will be unable to support the population.

The main reason for the decline in numbers is that Japanese women are having fewer children. There are strong economic reasons for this. Being pregnant in Japan is expensive, as

pregnancy is not covered by health insurance. This means that women must pay for their own medical care during pregnancy, including hospital check-ups. Also, health care is only provided free for infants up to the age of three (or five in some areas). Added to this are the huge costs of schooling and university education, which mean that many families decide they can afford to have only one or two children at the most.

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There are two particular problems that will result from the decline in population. The first is the cost of looking after people as they get older; and the second is the lack of younger workers to fill jobs. As more and more people reach retirement age, the country will have to find more money for their pensions. This has already meant raising the retirement age and obtaining higher contributions from both employers and employees. Businesses are also finding it difficult to recruit new staff, and it will become even harder in the future. If jobs cannot be filled, then Japan's productivity will fall, and so will its prosperity.

One obvious way to solve the labour shortage is to encourage immigration, something to which the Japanese as a nation are generally opposed. Japanese-born people make up 98.5% of the population, and it is difficult for foreigners to be accepted or to become Japanese citizens. In comparison, 18% of Switzerland's workforce are foreign born.

There is no doubt that Japan's population is declining, and although the government is aware of the problem, many feel that it has been slow to react.

Sources: [www.tokyotimes.com/record-fall-for-japans-population-a-quarter-aged-over-65/](http://www.tokyotimes.com/record-fall-for-japans-population-a-quarter-aged-over-65/)  
[www.worldmapper.org/articles/WW\\_Japan\\_pop.pdf](http://www.worldmapper.org/articles/WW_Japan_pop.pdf)

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