

South Korea Started Shrinking in 2020

It is usual for the two East Asian giants, China and Japan, to hog the demographic headlines, especially those bearing bad news. China is struggling with the fallout of its self-inflicted one child policy disaster, while Japan is in a sustained demographic decline.

But sandwiched between these two is a smaller nation with a similar story: South Korea. After years of phenomenally low fertility rates (of around one child per woman on average) the country is about to see its [first year on year population decline since records began in the 1950s](#).

In the past eleven months the population has dropped by nearly 16,000, so barring some upswing in births or drop in deaths in December, 2020 will be the calendar year in which the population started subsiding.

It seems likely that the South Korean population will have peaked at 51.851 million people in November 2019. 2020 will thus be a symbolic year – the population decline will not be major (around three tenths of one percent) but all other signs point to it being the first year in a long procession. *Statistics Korea* forecast that within 35 years, the country's population will fall by a fifth, to below 40 million, the same population it had in 1980.

In November the lowest number of births ever recorded in Korea was seen: 21,043. The decline in this figure can be seen by comparing it to the number of births in November 2015 (34,847) and to November 2010 (43,912).

Last month also saw the number of South Korean children aged under 10 fall below the four million mark to 3.98 million. By way of comparison, there are 3.69 million Koreans in their 70s

and 6.7 million in their 60s. The largest decadal figure is 8.65 million people who are in their 50s. There are 8.3 million in their 40s and only 4.8 million aged 10-19. There are nearly 2 million aged 80 or older.

As these figures show, South Korea is currently an aged society and will very soon be a super aged society (with over a fifth of its population aged 65 years or older). It will also be a declining society. One in which births are rarer and old age and deaths more common.

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