
20 Questions About Global Aging

See what you know about worldwide population aging in the early twenty-first century.

Answers appear on next page.

1. True or false? The world's children under age 5 outnumber people aged 65 and over.
2. The world's older population (65 and over) is increasing by approximately how many people each month in 2008?
 - a. 75,000
 - b. 350,000
 - c. 600,000
 - d. 870,000
3. Which of the world's developing regions has the highest percentage of older people?
 - a. Africa
 - b. Latin America
 - c. The Caribbean
 - d. Asia
4. China has the world's largest total population (more than 1.3 billion). Which country has the world's largest older population?
 - a. China
 - b. Germany
 - c. Russia
 - d. India
5. True or false? More than half of the world's older people live in the industrialized nations of Europe, North America, Japan, and Australia.
6. Which country has the world's highest percentage of older people in 2008?
 - a. Sweden
 - b. Japan
 - c. Spain
 - d. Italy
7. True or false? Current demographic projections suggest that 35 percent of all people in the United States will be at least 65 years of age by the year 2050.
8. True or false? The number of the world's "oldest old" (people 80 and over) is growing more rapidly than the older (65 and over) population as a whole.
9. Japan has the highest life expectancy among the major countries of the world. How many years can a Japanese baby born in 2008 expect to live, on average?
 - a. 70 years
 - b. 75 years
 - c. 82 years
 - d. 90 years
10. True or false? Today, average life expectancy at birth is less than 45 years in some countries.
11. What are the leading killers of older people in Europe and North America?
 - a. Cancers
 - b. Circulatory diseases
 - c. Respiratory diseases
 - d. Accidents
12. True or false? The percentage of older people in rural areas is generally lower than in large cities.
13. There are more older widows than widowers in virtually all countries because:
 - a. Women live longer than men.
 - b. Women typically marry men older than themselves.
 - c. Men are more likely to remarry after divorce or the death of a spouse.
 - d. All of the above.
14. True or false? Sex ratios at older ages (i.e., the number of older men per 100 older women) usually are 90 or greater.
15. In developed countries, recent increases in labor force participation rates of older workers are due to changing work patterns of:
 - a. Men
 - b. Women
 - c. Men and women
16. What proportion of the world's countries have a public old-age security program?
 - a. All
 - b. Three-fourths
 - c. One-half
 - d. One-fourth
17. True or false? In most countries, international migration has little effect on the overall population age structure.
18. In which country are older people least likely to live alone?
 - a. The Philippines
 - b. Hungary
 - c. Canada
 - d. Denmark
19. True or false? In developing countries, older men are more likely than older women to be illiterate.
20. True or false? In any country, it is almost impossible to have population aging and a decline in total population size at the same time.

Answers

- 1. True.** Although the world's population is aging, children still outnumber older people as of 2008. Projections indicate, however, that in fewer than 10 years, older people will outnumber children for the first time in history.
- 2. d.** The estimated change in the total size of the world's older population between July 2007 and July 2008 was more than 10.4 million people, an average of 870,000 each month.
- 3. c.** The Caribbean, with 7.8 percent of all people aged 65 and over in 2008. Corresponding figures for other regions are Latin America, 6.4 percent; Asia (excluding Japan), 6.2 percent; and Africa, 3.3 percent.
- 4. a.** China also has the largest older population, numbering 106 million in 2008.
- 5. False.** Although industrialized nations have higher percentages of older people than do most developing countries, 62 percent of all people aged 65 and over now live in the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania.
- 6. b.** Japan, with 22 percent of its population aged 65 or over, has recently supplanted Italy as the world's oldest major country.
- 7. False.** Although the United States will age rapidly when the Baby Boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) begin to reach age 65 after the year 2010, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over in the year 2050 is projected to be 20 percent (compared with 12 percent today).
- 8. True.** The oldest old are the fastest-growing component of many national populations. The world's growth rate for the 80-and-over population from 2007 to 2008 was 4.3 percent, while that of the world's older (65 and over) population as a whole was 2.1 percent (compared with 1.2 percent for the total [all ages] population).
- 9. c.** 82 years, up from about 52 in 1947.
- 10. True.** In some African countries (e.g., Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) where the HIV/AIDS epidemic is particularly devastating, average life expectancy at birth is less than 45 years.
- 11. b.** Circulatory diseases (especially heart disease and stroke) typically are the leading cause of death as reported by the World Health Organization. In the United States in 2004, heart disease was the leading cause of death in the 65-and-over age group, accounting for 30 percent of all deaths. This percentage, however, has declined in recent decades (it was 44 percent in the United States in 1980).
- 12. False.** Rural-to-urban migration tends to lower the percentage of younger adults in rural areas and correspondingly raise the percentage of older residents.
- 13. d.** All of the above.
- 14. False.** Sex ratios at older ages are 90 or above in about 20 percent of the world's countries/areas. Sex ratios at older ages are 80 or below in a majority of countries/areas and 50 or below in parts of the former Soviet Union.
- 15. c.** From the late 1960s until the 1990s, labor force participation rates of older men in most developed countries were declining, whereas those for women were often increasing. More recently, activity rates for men also have begun to increase.
- 16. b.** As of 2004, 167 countries/areas of the world (74 percent) reported having some form of an old age/disability/survivors program. In many cases, program coverage is limited to certain occupational subgroups.
- 17. True.** International migration does not play a major role in the aging process of most countries, but it can be important in small populations that have experienced a combination of emigration of working-aged adults, immigration of older retirees from other countries, and/or return migration of former emigrants.
- 18. a.** The Philippines. The percentage of older people living alone in developing countries is usually much lower than that in developed countries; levels in the latter may exceed 40 percent.
- 19. False.** Older women are less likely to be literate. For example, data from China's 2000 census revealed that 26 percent of older women could read and write, compared with 66 percent of older men.
- 20. False.** Total population size in at least 11 countries is projected to decline from today's levels by at least 1 million people by 2050; in some countries (e.g., Japan, Russia, and the Ukraine) the decline has already begun. All of these nations are aging, and the combination of population aging and population decline is historically unprecedented.