

Global Times: Has China's 'demographic dividend' disappeared?

Beijing, China Mar 12, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](http://www.IssueWire.com)) - Currently, China's economy is steadily advancing along the path of high-quality development, even as domestic and international circumstances become increasingly complex. Some Western media, due to misunderstanding or bias, have repeatedly questioned or even distorted China's economic development. Accordingly, the Global Times launches the "Q&A on China's Economy" column to publish opinion pieces to present facts and clarify perceptions.

As new changes emerge in China's population age structure, some Western commentators claim that China's future development will lose its "demographic momentum." Such claims of a "loss of demographic momentum" not only disregard the basic laws of population development but also reflect a misunderstanding and misjudgment of the deeper logic behind China's high-quality population development.

Population issues are not a simple either-or question, as the notion goes: "fewer people means slower growth; more elderly people means heavier burdens." According to economic theory, labor as a factor of production affects economic development through both its quantity and quality. During a period of demographic transition, even if the growth of the labor force slows or declines, a continued rise in educational attainment means that the supply of effective labor can still increase, allowing the demographic dividend to continue being released. Data show that the average years of schooling for retirees around 60 years old in China are about seven to eight years, while the average years of schooling for young people newly entering the labor market has reached 14 years. This means that the increase in effective labor contributed by new workers far outweighs the reduction caused by retirements, resulting in a net overall growth in effective labor.

China is now undergoing a transition from a "demographic dividend" to a "talent dividend." Chinese modernization is modernization on a vast population scale. The country's enormous population and abundant labor supply continue to provide room for the release of quantitative demographic dividends. By the end of 2025, China's total population remained a vast 1.405 billion, with 851 million people of working age (16-59). The scale of its labor force exceeds the combined labor forces of major developed economies in Europe and the US, ranking among the largest in the world and serving as a strong foundation for high-quality economic development. At the same time, the broad domestic market created by such a large population, as well as a comprehensive industrial support system and extensive human resources remain a key pillar enabling the economy to withstand external shocks and maintain stable growth.

As the overall quality of the population continues to improve, China's advantage in talent resources is becoming increasingly evident. The national higher education gross enrollment rate has risen to over 60 percent, and the average years of schooling among the working-age population has reached 11.3 years, equivalent to a second-year university level. More than 60 percent of newly added workers have received higher education. The total number of people with higher education has exceeded 250 million, the largest in the world, and continues to grow by more than 10 million each year. At the same time, a growing workforce of highly skilled, interdisciplinary professionals is emerging to support the development of new quality productive forces. China now has the world's largest pool of research and development personnel. From industrial workers driving the upgrading of manufacturing to scientists advancing breakthroughs in key core technologies, the expanding talent base is continuously injecting

endogenous momentum into China's high-quality development.

The enormous potential of the silver economy embedded in the process of population aging is also becoming a new source of demographic momentum. By the end of 2025, among China's population aged 60 and above, those aged 60-69 - generally healthy and relatively young seniors - accounted for more than 55 percent, totaling over 150 million people. This group, characterized by good health, professional skills, rich experience and a strong willingness to participate in social activities, represents an important supplement to China's human resource pool, with significant potential for further development. Meanwhile, as the income levels and consumption demands of older people continue to rise, the "silver economy" has emerged as a new engine of growth, encompassing sectors such as elderly healthcare, cultural tourism, age-friendly technology, smart eldercare services, livable environments and services tailored to older adults.

Whether a country's demographic momentum can sustain its modernization ultimately depends on whether it can follow the laws of population development and activate demographic opportunities through systematic institutional arrangements, transforming them into demographic dividends and achieving alignment between high-quality population development and high-quality economic and social development. China's population policies have never relied on rigid or one-dimensional measures. Instead, they represent a systematic institutional design that adapts to demographic transition while balancing immediate needs with long-term goals. This reflects the scientific approach to modern population governance. The period of the 15th Five-Year Plan will mark a deeper stage of China's demographic transition. A series of initiatives aimed at promoting high-quality population development are not only proactive responses to structural demographic changes but also strategic arrangements designed to cultivate new development advantages and secure initiative in future international competition. As international media have observed, China's systematic approach to addressing demographic transition demonstrates the foresight and governance wisdom of a mature major country.

In the face of global challenges of low fertility and population aging, China remains committed to injecting certainty into global development through its own high-quality growth. Unlike some countries that rely on short-term stimulus policies to cope with demographic transition, China is pursuing a path of high-quality population development centered on enhancing human capital, aiming to foster a modern workforce characterized by strong capabilities, sufficient scale, optimized structure and balanced distribution. By actively responding to population aging, unleashing the innovative vitality of talent, and cultivating new forms of demographic dividends, China is not only strengthening the foundation for its own modernization but also offering new ideas and directions for other countries facing demographic transitions.

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