Culture Focus

Population growth

The Office for National Statistics, an organisation that collects numerical data on the people living in Britain, recently released figures forecasting that the population of the UK could rise from 61 million to 71.6 million by 2033. Growth at this rate would be the largest the country has seen in more than a century. The figures suggest that the population of England alone could reach the current combined population of the whole of the UK.

These evaluations released by the ONS are based on data related to recent trends in population growth. This means that they are simply estimates rather than accurate predictions. The figures are largely linked to levels of immigration and the twofold effect this has on the population; the direct effect of people moving to the UK, and the indirect effect of those people going on to have children. High life expectancy and an ageing population also contribute to the figures, with the number of people over the age of 85 likely to more than double.

It is impossible to accurately predict future demographics and figures of this kind come up against much criticism. Many people are arguing that immigration has actually started to fall and that the population will never reach these estimated figures. Immigration is a very important issue in the minds of the British voters and so the main political parties are suggesting strong lines of action regarding future policy in response. There is also a call for significant improvement in reaction to increasing life expectancy. The public is stressing concern regarding the national resources for public services such as hospitals, pensions, and housing. Environmental questions have been raised in connection with population density, and the UK’s targets in tackling climate change.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the pattern of population growth in your country compare to that in Britain?
2. What cultural impact do you think population growth will have on Britain, both in terms of immigration and an ageing population?
3. Do you think that Britain is well equipped for a population surge? What measures do you think are being taken in the light of the forecasts?

SUGGESTIONS

Have a look at some of the reports on the Office for National Statistics website and try to get an idea of the other issues that impact the population of Britain.

VOCABULARY

Find definitions of the following words:

demographic
forecast
line of action
tackle
trend