Taking care of elderly population

What is the issue?

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India has fastest growing demography of Sixty-plus, yet there are no significant public policies to address the elderly.

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What is the status of senior citizens in India?

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- Roughly 9 per cent of India’s population is aged 60 years or more, as per Census figures from 2011, as opposed to 12 per cent globally.
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- By 2050, the 60+ age group is expected to form 19 per cent of India’s population.
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- Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana are the top five states where the elderly comprise 10 per cent or more of the population.
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- While the north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam have the smallest proportion of people aged 60 or more.
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What are the problems faced by the elderly?

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- Many rural families cannot afford a better care of the elderly, lakhs of elderly citizens live in penury.
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- Factors such as decreasing family size, migration of the young for work and abuse within the family makes the elderly stressful.
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- Such elderly people live alone, the majority of them women and are easy targets of crime.

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- Residential homes are not yet a viable alternative, only the economically privileged can afford private homes.
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- The majority of India’s aged subsist on meagre support from the government.
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- The elderly has to face ambiguous processes and unhelpful and rude staff to receive elderly benefits from the government.
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What are the role of the government in this regard?

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- Caring for the elderly is a Directive Principle of State Policy under Article 41 of the Constitution.
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- The Indian government has been providing social pensions under the National Social Assistance Programme since 1995.
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- In 2007, the programme was reintroduced as the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) for elderly people who belong to a below-poverty-line household.
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- The central government contributes Rs 200 per month towards pension for each person aged 60 years or above and Rs 500 per month for everyone aged 80 years and above.
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- State governments are expected to supplement this with at least a matching sum.
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- The draft National Policy for Senior Citizens of 2011 recommended an amount of Rs 1,000 as monthly pension under IGNOAPS.
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- Although the policy has not yet been finalised, some states have increased their contribution to comply with this recommendation.
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Way forward

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- By and large, pensions in most states remain meagre, varying from Rs 200-500, and it has no relevance to the cost of living today.
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- There is an ongoing public interest litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court demands a basic old-age pension of Rs 2,000 per month.
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- The government must take action in this regard and make proper measures to support the elderly.
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- Government should not see them as mere vote banks instead recognise them as old assets of the nation.
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Source: Business Standard

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