



India's Demography

This editorial is based on [“Moving Policy Away from Population Control”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 13/08/2022. It talks about the changes in India's demography since Independence and the measures that can be taken to take advantage of those changes to the fullest.

For Prelims: India's demographic dividend, UN World Population Prospects (WPP), 2022, TFR, Under-five mortality rates, Maternal mortality ratio, Global Hunger Index

For Mains: Demographic Changes of India, Significance of Population Growth, Reaping the Demographic Dividend - Bottlenecks and Way ahead.

Since its Independence, India has witnessed a huge change in its demographic structure. It has gone through [population explosion](#) (Census 1951) and has also witnessed decline in [total fertility rate](#).

On the plus side, there have been improvements in various mortality indicators, but there also exist certain impediments to reaping the demographic dividend in terms of improving living standards, providing skill and training and generating employment.

India's large population is one of the upper hands that India may have over the rest of the world. What is needed is the steps in the right direction to harness the potential of the demographic dividend to its fullest.

What Demographic Changes has India gone through in Time?

- **Population Growth:** The [UN World Population Prospects \(WPP\), 2022](#), forecasts India becoming the most populous country by 2023, surpassing China, with a 140 crore population. India currently has **17.5% of the world's population**.
 - This is four times the population India had at the time of Independence in 1947 (34 crore).
 - India is projected to reach **150 crore by 2030 and 166 crore by 2050**.
- **Decline in India's TFR:** In 2021, India's [Total Fertility Rate \(TFR\) slipped below the replacement level fertility](#) (which is 2.1 children per woman) to two. Post-Independence, in the **1950s, India had a TFR of six**.
 - Several States have reached a TFR of two except for Bihar, UP, Jharkhand, Manipur and Meghalaya.
 - The main causes for this include [high illiteracy levels](#), [rampant child marriage](#), high levels of [under-five mortality rates](#), a low [workforce participation of women](#), lower **contraceptive usage** and a **lack of economic and decisive say** among women.
- **Improvement in Mortality Indicators: Life expectancy at birth** saw a remarkable recovery graph from 32 years in 1947 to **70 years in 2019**.
 - The **infant mortality rate** declined from 133 in 1951 (for the big States) to **27 in 2020**.

- The **under-five mortality rate** fell from **250 to 41**, and the [maternal mortality ratio](#) dropped from 2,000 in the 1940s to **103 in 2019**.

What is the Significance of Population Growth?

- A larger population is perceived to mean **greater human capital, higher economic growth and improved standards of living**.
 - Better economic growth is brought about by increased economic activities due to higher working age population and lower dependent population.
- In the last seven decades, the share of the working age population has grown from 50% to 65%, resulting in a **remarkable decline in the dependency ratio** (number of children and elderly persons per working age population).
- As per the WPP 2022, India will have **one of the largest workforces globally**.
 - In the next 25 years, one in five working-age group persons will be living in India.

What are the Bottlenecks in Reaping the Demographic Dividend?

- **Concerns regarding Labour Force:** India's labour force is constrained by the absence of women from the workforce, **only a fourth of women are employed**.
 - The **quality of educational attainments is not up to the mark**, and the country's **workforce lacks the basic skills** required for the modernised job market.
 - India will be having the largest population but its **employment rates are still one of the lowest**.
- **Sex Ratio still Dissappointing:** Another demographic concern of independent India is the **male-dominant sex ratio**.
 - In 1951, the country had a sex ratio of 946 females per 1,000 males.
 - In 2011, the sex ratio was 943 females per 1,000 males and by 2022, it is expected to be approximately 950 females per 1,000 males.
 - Even now, **one in three girls missing globally due to sex selection** (both pre-and post-natal), **is from India**.
- **Hunger: Every other woman in the reproductive age** group in India is [anaemic](#), and **every third child below five is stunted**.
 - [India stands 101 out of 116 nations in the Global Hunger Index](#) which is pretty daunting for a country which has one of the most extensive welfare programmes for food security through the [Public Distribution System](#) and the [Midday Meals Scheme](#).
- **Health Disease Burden:** The disease pattern in the country has also seen a tremendous shift in these 75 years: while India was fighting communicable diseases post-Independence, there has been a **transition towards [non-communicable diseases \(NCDs\)](#)**, the **cause of more than 62% of total deaths**.
 - India is a **global disease burden leader** as the share of NCDs has almost doubled since the 1990s.
 - India is home to over eight crore people with diabetes.
 - More than a quarter of global **deaths due to air pollution** occur in India alone.
 - India's **health-care infrastructure is also highly inadequate** and inefficient. Additionally, India's **public health financing is low**, varying between 1% and 1.5% of GDP, which is among the lowest percentages in the world.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Focus on Elderly Population:** India is currently a young nation but the [share of its elderly population is increasing](#) and is expected to be 12% by 2050.
 - So, advance investments in the development of a **robust social, financial and healthcare support system for old people** is the need of the hour.
 - The focus of action should be on **extensive investment in human capital, on older adults living with dignity**, and on **healthy population ageing**.
 - Steps should be taken to adapt public programmes to the growing proportion of older persons such as by **improving the sustainability of social security and pension systems**.

- **Efforts for Better Living Standards:** There needs to be preparedness with **suitable infrastructure, conducive social welfare schemes** and massive **investment in quality education and health.**
 - To maximize the potential benefits of a favourable age distribution, countries need to invest in the further development of their human capital and **promote opportunities for productive employment and decent work.**
 - The **focus should not be on population control** as it is not a severe problem now. Instead, an **augmentation of the quality of life** should be the priority.
- **Skilling:** For those already in the 25-64 age bracket, there is a need for skilling, which is the only way to ensure they are more productive and have better incomes.
 - Irrespective of rural or urban setting, the **public school system must ensure** that every child completes high school education, and is **pushed into appropriate skilling, training and vocational education** in line with market demand.
- **Bridging Gender Gaps in Workforce:** New skills and opportunities for women and girls befitting their participation in a **3 trillion dollar economy** is urgently needed. This can be done by:
 - **Legally compulsory gender budgeting** to analyse gender disaggregated data and its impact on policies
 - **Increasing childcare benefits**
 - **Boosting tax incentives for part-time work**

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the key challenges in reaping the demographic dividend of India and suggest appropriate measures that can be taken in this regard.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. In the context of any country, which one of the following would be considered as part of its social capital? (2019)

- (a) The proportion of literates in the population
- (b) The stock of its buildings, other infrastructure and machines
- (c) The size of population in the working age group
- (d) The level of mutual trust and harmony in the society

Ans: (d)

Q. India is regarded as a country with “Demographic Dividend”. This is due to (2011)

- (a) Its high population in the age group below 15 years
- (b) Its high population in the age group of 15-64 year
- (c) Its high population in the age group above 65 years
- (d) Its high total population

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q. Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. (2021)

Q. “Empowering women is the key to control the population growth.” Discuss. (2019)

Q. Critically examine whether growing population is the cause of poverty or poverty is the main cause of population increase in India. (2015)



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