

India's Population Story

What is the issue?

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Evidence from India's last Census in 2011, confirmed by data from the recent National Family Health Survey 2017 (NFHS-4), shows that **fertility in India is fast approaching replacement levels.**

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What does it mean?

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- **Replacement level** fertility is the total fertility rate—the average number of children born per woman—at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next, without migration.

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- This means that couples will have children who will essentially replace their number, to stabilise population growth.

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- The NFHS-4 shows that in the past decade, the average number of children per family has come down from 2.7 to 2.2.

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- **With replacement fertility being 2.1 children per woman**, this is good news for the land and the people.

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How will be the growth of total population?

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- Even after fertility rates drop to replacement levels, **the total population will still grow**, and is likely to reach 1.7 billion by 2050.

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- The thrust of this growth will come from the youth bulge, with 365 million **(10-24 years old)** already in, or soon to enter, their reproductive ages.

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- Even if they have children only in numbers that replace themselves, the resultant growth due to such a **large base of young people** will drive the growth momentum for population.

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- For India as a whole, 75% of population growth in the coming decade will be due to this momentum.

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Managing demand-supply of working population:

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- When States are clustered in terms of fertility levels, one foresees a predominantly youthful north and an ageing south.

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- Most of the current and future demographic potential is locked in the northern States and largely located in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.

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- **In the south, there will be a dearth of young working people to keep up and expand the level of economic development.**

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- Investing in young people in the north to realise the demographic dividend will be a win-win situation for all India, north and south.

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What is the way ahead?

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- From the policy perspective, this means that for India as a whole, it is time for the emphasis to be on momentum-focussed policies and programmes.

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- The **National Health Policy 2017** emphasises quality of care and commitment to sustainable development, and positions improved access, education and empowerment as the basis for population stabilisation.

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- It is now for States to align their own health and population policies to the national policy.

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Source: The Hindu

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