



## Decline in India's Total Fertility Rate

**For Prelims:** [Total Fertility Rate](#), [Internal migration](#), [National Family Health Survey](#), [Dependency ratio](#), [Middle-income trap](#), [In vitro fertilization](#), [Surrogacy](#), [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#), Replacement Level

**For Mains:** Demographic Transition and Population Growth in India, Impacts of Declining Fertility Rates, Government Policies for Population Control and Reproductive Health, Aging Population and Economic Sustainability

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

The **Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) 2021** has revealed a **steep decline in India's [Total Fertility Rate \(TFR\)](#)** over the decades.

- This raises concerns about **socio-economic and political repercussions**, particularly in southern states.

### What are the Key Findings of the Study?

- **India's Fertility Trends:** India's TFR dropped from **6.18 in the 1950s to 1.9 in 2021**, below the replacement level of **2.1**.
  - By 2100, the TFR in India is projected to fall further to **1.04 (barely one child per woman)**.
- **Regional Variations in India:** Southern states like **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka** achieved **replacement-level fertility** earlier than northern states.
  - By 2036, Kerala's aged population is **expected to surpass children (23%)**. **High [labor wages](#), [quality of life](#), and [internal migration](#)** are expected to bring migrant labor to **60 lakh by 2030** (about one-sixth of the State's population).
  - The demographic shift was driven by **[high literacy](#), [women's empowerment](#), and [advances in social and health sectors](#)**.
- **Reasons for Fertility Decline:**
  - **Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors:** India has one of the **oldest birth control/family planning programs**, but factors like **female literacy, workforce participation, and women's empowerment** have had a greater influence on **fertility decline**.
    - Changing attitudes toward **marriage and reproduction, including delays or avoidance of marriage and motherhood**, played a significant role.
  - **Health and Migration Issues:** Increasing cases of **[infertility in both men and women](#)** contribute to the decline.
    - The availability and **social acceptance of [abortions](#)** have likely contributed to the falling fertility rates.
    - More young people are **moving abroad for education and jobs**, settling there,

which reduces fertility rates in India.

## Total Fertility Rate and Replacement Level

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** The TFR is the **average number of children a group of women** would have by the end of their **reproductive years (ages 15 to 49)** if they followed the current fertility rates throughout their lives, **assuming no mortality. It is expressed as children per woman.**
  - As per the [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS-5\) \(2019-21\)](#), the TFR has declined to **2.0 children per woman from 2.2 children per woman (NFHS- 4 (2015-16))**.
- **Replacement Level:** A TFR of **2.1 is considered the replacement level**, where each generation replaces itself without significant **population growth or decline.**
  - A **TFR lower than 2.1**, however, can lead to **negative population growth**, potentially causing **long-term demographic challenges**, including an [ageing population](#).

## What are the Consequences of Low Fertility Rates?

- **Aging Populations:** With fewer births and **longer [life expectancy](#)**, the population is **aging rapidly.**
  - India currently has **149 million people aged 60 years or above**, comprising **10.5% of the total population**. By 2050, this number is expected to surge to **347 million, or 20.8% of the population**.
- **Economic Impact:** A **[shrinking young workforce](#)** and a growing elderly population lead to higher **[dependency ratios](#)** and strain **[social welfare](#)** and **healthcare systems.**
  - The rising costs of **pensions and elder care** will burden both governments and families.
  - Unlike **developed nations that experienced population ageing with higher per capita incomes**, India faces the challenge of **[ageing without the same economic luxury](#)**.
  - India risks getting caught in the **[middle-income trap](#)** if its economy cannot sustain rapid growth.
- **Impact on Labour Market:** The decline in fertility could reduce the **size of the workforce**, negatively **impacting productivity.**

## Global Approaches in Tackling Declining Fertility Levels

- **Germany:** Liberal labor laws, parental leave, and benefits have seen success in increasing birth rates.
- **Denmark:** Offers state-funded **[in vitro fertilization \(IVF\)](#)** treatments for women below 40 years of age.
- **Russia and Poland:** Russia provides **one-time financial incentives** for families with more children, and Poland offers cash payments for families with multiple children.

## Way Forward

- **Policy Adjustments:** India can emulate Germany and Denmark by adopting flexible **labor policies**, and **parental benefits to improve work-life balance**, and contribute to increasing fertility rates by **supporting working parents.**
  - Raising a child costs **Rs. 30 lakhs to Rs. 1.2 crores**, deterring many middle-class families. To address this, **make education affordable**, upgrade public institutions with **digital and practical learning to avoid [skill mismatch](#)**, offer subsidies, and tax benefits.
  - Policymakers **must ensure economic growth** while supporting an **ageing population**, or the **[demographic dividend](#)** could turn into a disaster.

- **Focus on Health and Nutrition:** Addressing nutritional needs and healthcare for mothers and children through the [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#) schemes, along with promoting childcare institutions for well-being, and [prenatal trauma](#) support, is crucial.
  - Expanding initiatives like **Telangana's distribution of pregnancy kits** to support maternal health can aid in improving fertility rates across India.
- **Reproductive Support:** Provide affordable **IVF** and promote [Surrogacy](#) to increase child ratios without impacting career advancements.

**Drishti Mains Question:**

Analyze the impact of declining fertility rates on India's socio-economic structure. What policy measures can be implemented to reverse this trend?

**UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

- Q1.** "Empowering women is the key to control the population growth." Discuss. **(2019)**
- Q2.** Critically examine the effect of globalization on the aged population in India. **(2013)**
- Q3.** Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. **(2021)**

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