



INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC PRIME – SOCIAL ISSUES

NEWS: India is in its demographic prime, with **67.3%** of the population aged **15-59** years, a phase that will persist for three more decades.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

- **Youth and Elderly Composition:**
 - **26%** of the population is below 14 years.
 - Only **7%** are above 65 years, significantly lower compared to the **US (17%)** and **Europe (21%)**.
- **Future Projections:**

By 2030, India's working-age population will be **68.9%**, with a median age of **28.4** years and a dependency ratio of **31.2%**. In absolute terms, India will have **1.04 billion working-age individuals**, constituting the **largest workforce in the world**.

Realizing the Potential of Demographic Dividend

- **Wealth Creation Requires Productivity:**

To translate these demographic numbers into economic growth, India needs:

 - **High productivity** driven by **technology, innovation, and high-end services**.
 - Focus on **R&D, healthcare, and life sciences**.
- **Foundation of Productivity:**
 - High productivity depends on **education, cognitive ability, and physical health**.
 - These factors develop from the **foetal stage**, continuing through **childhood, adolescence, and adulthood**, requiring proper **health, nutrition, and educational care**.

Educational and Health Challenges in the Working-Age Population

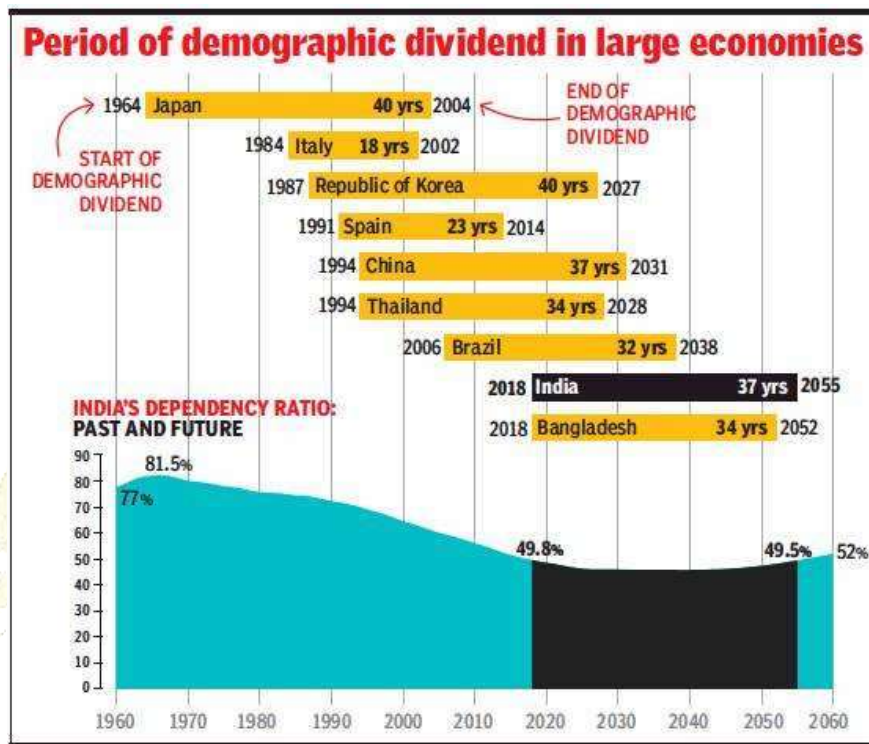
- **NFHS-5 Findings (15-49 Years):**

Education: Only **41%** of women and **50.2%** of men have **10+** years of schooling.
- **Health Issues:**
 - **Anaemia:** **57%** of women and **25%** of men are anaemic.
 - **Underweight Population:** **18.7%** of women and **16.2%** of men have a Body Mass Index (BMI) below normal.
- **Impact on Employability:**

Despite ongoing skilling programs, employers struggle to find the required skills, leading to **high unemployment rates** even among the **educated youth**.



Current Status of Adolescents: Future Workforce



- **Health and Education Gaps in Adolescents (15-19 Years):**
 - **Education:**
 - Only 34% of girls and 35.9% of boys aged 15-24 have completed 12+ years of education.
 - **Anaemia and Nutrition:**
 - 59% of girls and 31% of boys are anaemic.
 - Normal BMI levels are found in only 54.9% of girls and 52.6% of boys.
- **Learning Deficits (ASER 2023):**
 - Only 77% of 17-18-year-olds can read Class 2 textbooks.
 - Only 35% can do basic division, with minimal improvement in learning levels across Grades V to VIII.

Alarming Health and Nutrition Issues in Children

- **NFHS-5 Findings for Children:**
 - **Stunting:** 35.5% of children under 5 are stunted.
 - **Wasting:** 19.3% are wasted.



- **Underweight: 32.1%** of children are underweight.
- **Anaemia: 67.1%** of children aged 6-59 months are anaemic.
- **Dietary Deficiency:** Shockingly, only **11.3%** of children aged 6-23 months receive a **minimal adequate diet**.
- **Impact on Brain Development:**
 - **90% of brain development** occurs by the age of 5.
 - Lack of adequate nutrition during this phase hampers physical, cognitive, and emotional growth, leading to reduced learning and skill acquisition potential in later years.

The Implications of Neglecting the Demographic Dividend

- **Aging Population Post-2030:**
India will begin **aging after 2030**, with:
 - A declining **workforce population**.
 - A rising **aging population** in poor health.
- **Consequences of an Unskilled Population:**
 - A large, unskilled, and aging population can become a significant **economic burden**.
 - **Unemployment** will rise, disposable income will remain low, and high consumption expectations will be unmet.
- **Migration Challenges:**
The flight of **human capital** from weaker sections to foreign markets offering secondary labor opportunities will not solve the problem.

Policy Imperatives for Strengthening the Demographic Dividend

- **Real-Time Analysis:**
India must conduct a serious **real-time situation analysis** of its current and future demographic dividend.
- **Life Cycle-Based Framework:**
 - Redesign policies to focus on strengthening **nutrition, health, and education** across the life cycle, from the foetal stage to adulthood.
- **Nutrition and Health Interventions:**
 - Ensure children receive **adequate diets** to optimize brain and physical development.
- **Educational Reforms:**
 - Bridge learning deficits in rural and urban populations.



- Equip adolescents with skills tailored to **emerging job markets**.

Conclusion: A Call for Action

India's demographic dividend represents a significant opportunity but also a looming challenge. The success of this opportunity depends on investing in:

- **Nutrition** during the critical early years.
- **Quality education and skilling programs** to boost employability.
- **Health interventions** to build a physically and cognitively capable workforce.

Without these investments, India risks transforming its demographic advantage into a **burden**, with rising unemployment, poor health outcomes, and limited economic growth. **The time for action is now.**

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-asset-less-ageing-population-with-poor-health-is-a-crisis-in-the-making-9728639/?ref=top_opinion

