

5. Decline in Birth Rate & Total Fertility Rate – Geography

India's birth rate down, first dip in Total Fertility Rate in 2 years – Sample Registration Survey Statistical Report. The SRS 2023 report indicates India's Total Fertility Rate has fallen to a historic low of 1.9, signaling a major demographic shift toward population stabilization. However, the country grapples with significant regional fertility imbalances, a rapidly ageing population, and a persistently skewed sex ratio at birth.

Introduction to the SRS Statistical Report 2023

The Office of the Registrar General of India has released the Sample Registration Survey (SRS) Statistical Report for 2023. The report reveals a significant decline in India's birth rate and fertility trends, highlighting a major demographic shift with profound policy implications for the nation. For the first time in two years, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen, signaling a move towards population stabilization.

Key Findings of the Report

Crude Birth Rate (CBR) – The national CBR has declined from 19.1 live births per 1,000 population in 2022 to 18.4 in 2023. Highest CBR – Bihar continues to have the highest birth rate at 25.8. Lowest CBR – Tamil Nadu recorded the lowest birth rate at 12.0.

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) – The national TFR, the average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime, has fallen to 1.9 in 2023. This is a drop from the consistent rate of 2.0 observed in both 2021 and 2022. Highest TFR – Bihar leads with a TFR of 2.8, followed by Uttar Pradesh (2.6), Madhya Pradesh (2.4), Rajasthan (2.3), and Chhattisgarh (2.2). Lowest TFR – Delhi has the lowest TFR at 1.2, followed by West Bengal (1.3), Tamil Nadu (1.3), and Maharashtra (1.4).

Crude Death Rate (CDR) – The CDR has seen a reduction from 6.8 deaths per 1,000 population in 2022 to 6.4 in 2023. Highest CDR – Odisha recorded the highest death rate at 8.3. Lowest CDR – Delhi recorded the lowest death rate at 4.1.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) – The national IMR now stands at 25 deaths per 1,000 live births. This represents a one-point decline from 2022 and a significant seven-point fall over the last five years, indicating improved child healthcare.

Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) – The SRB for 2023 stood at 917 females per 1,000 males, showing a slight improvement of three points from the previous year. Highest SRB – Chhattisgarh (974) and Kerala (971) have the most favorable sex ratios at birth. Lowest SRB – Uttarakhand recorded the lowest SRB at 868.

Notable Decline – Bihar's SRB has shown a worrying decline, falling from 964 in 2020 to 897 in 2023.

Ageing Population – The proportion of the elderly (aged 60 and above) in the population rose to 9.7% in 2023, marking a 0.7 percentage point increase in just one year. Highest Elderly Share – Kerala has the highest proportion of elderly citizens at 15%. Lowest Elderly Share – Assam, Delhi, and Jharkhand have the lowest share, ranging from 7.6% to 7.7%.

Understanding Key Demographic Terms

Crude Birth Rate (CBR) – The total number of live births occurring in a year for every 1,000 people in a population. It gives a general indication of a country's fertility.

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) – The average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime (ages 15–49) if she were to experience the current age-specific fertility rates. A TFR of 2.1 is considered the "replacement level."

Crude Death Rate (CDR) – The total number of deaths occurring in a year for every 1,000 people in a population. It indicates the overall mortality trend.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) – The number of deaths of infants under one year of age for every 1,000 live births. This is a critical indicator of a nation's healthcare quality and socio-economic development.

Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) – The number of female births for every 1,000 male births. A low SRB is often an indicator of strong gender bias and the prevalence of sex-selective practices.

Elderly Population Share – The percentage of the total population that is aged 60 years and above. This highlights the trend of population ageing.

About the Sample Registration Survey (SRS)

Launch – It was initiated in 1970 by the Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Purpose – To provide reliable, annual estimates of key demographic indicators like birth rate, death rate, fertility, mortality, and sex ratio at both national and state levels.

Methodology – It employs a robust dual-record system. This involves continuous recording of demographic events by a local enumerator, which is then cross-verified by an independent six-monthly survey.

Coverage – It is one of the world's largest demographic surveys, covering a representative sample of villages and urban blocks across the country.

Significance –

1. It is the primary source of health and population data between the decennial Census rounds.
2. It is crucial for monitoring key national programs like the National Health Mission (NHM) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. Data from the SRS is used by NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), and state governments for evidence-based planning and policy evaluation.

Socio-Economic Implications of the Findings

Demographic Transition – With 18 States and Union Territories now having a below-replacement fertility rate ($TFR < 2.1$), India is clearly in a phase of demographic transition towards population stabilization.

Deepening Regional Divide – A significant population imbalance is emerging. Fertility remains above the replacement level in northern and central states, while southern and western states have much lower rates.

The Ageing Challenge – India faces a dual challenge – managing a large, youthful population in some regions while simultaneously preparing for rapid ageing and its associated economic and social pressures in others.

Persistent Sex Ratio Concerns – The continued imbalance in the SRB in states like Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, and Maharashtra indicates that deep-rooted gender bias and sex-selective practices remain a serious issue.

Maternal & Infant Health Progress – While the declining IMR is a positive achievement, the report highlights those significant challenges remain, as 1 in every 40 infants in India still dies before their first birthday.

The Way Forward – Policy Recommendations

1. **Balanced Population Policy** – Policies must be tailored to address regional disparities—focusing on fertility stabilization in the north while developing robust systems to manage an ageing population in the south.
2. **Gender Equality Measures** – Strengthen and expand programs like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** and launch widespread community awareness campaigns to combat gender bias and correct the skewed Sex Ratio at Birth.
3. **Targeted Health Interventions** – Further improve **maternal and neonatal care**, with a special focus on states that still have a high Infant Mortality Rate.
4. **Robust Elderly Support Systems** – Proactively expand social security nets, including **pensions, accessible healthcare, and social support**, to cater to the needs of the rapidly rising senior population.
5. **Enhanced Data Transparency** – Ensure the timely and regular release of key datasets from the **Sample Registration System (SRS), Civil Registration System (CRS), and Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD)** to enable effective, evidence-based policymaking.

Comparison – SRS vs. CRS vs. MCCD

System	Authority / Legal Basis	Purpose	Key Features
SRS (Sample Registration System)	Registrar General of India (RGI)	Provides reliable sample-based estimates of birth rate, death rate, IMR, and fertility trends.	Uses a dual-record system - continuous enumeration by a local enumerator and an independent half-yearly survey by a supervisor.
CRS (Civil Registration System)	Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969	Aims for universal and compulsory registration of all births, deaths, and stillbirths.	Provides legal certificates and demographic data for planning and population estimates.
MCCD (Medical Certification of Cause of Death)	Linked to CRS under the same Act	Captures cause-specific mortality data to understand disease patterns.	A doctor certifies the cause of death on a standard form, which is crucial for epidemiology, health planning, and monitoring diseases.

Conclusion

The SRS 2023 data clearly indicates that India is entering a new phase of demographic maturity. With fertility rates stabilizing below replacement levels in a majority of states, the focus of policy must now shift. The key challenges ahead are managing regional fertility imbalances, addressing the pressures of an ageing population, and eradicating persistent gender bias. Future policies must be grounded in the principles of equity, inclusiveness, and the constitutional values of justice and dignity for all citizens.

Source - <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/indias-infant-mortality-rate-touches-low-of-25-down-from-40-in-2013/article70011215.ece>