

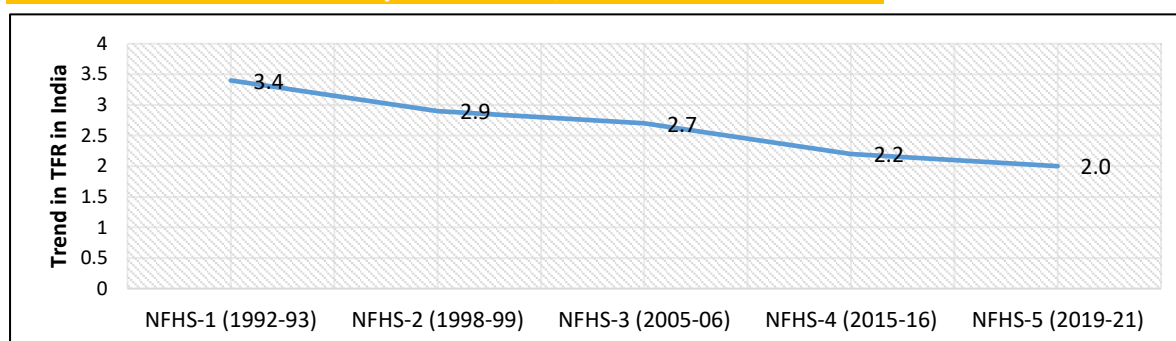
## Is India's Population Stabilising?

There is a commonly-held concern about the high rate of growth of India's population. However, evidence reveals that the average number of children born to a woman or Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and the population growth rate are declining.

According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21), India's TFR is 2.0<sup>1</sup>, which is now below the TFR goal of 2.1 as envisaged by the Government of India's Population Policy 2000. A TFR of 2.1 is considered **replacement fertility**, a level that indicates that the population will stop growing, and only **replace** itself over time from one generation to the next, without migration. According to the United Nations, if on average women have 2.1 children each over a sustained period of time, the population neither grows nor declines and thus stabilises. This means that for India's population to stabilise or decline, it would have to maintain a TFR equal to or less than 2.1 for a sustained period of time. The decline in India's TFR, which stood at 6.0 in the 1950s, to its current level, is a significant achievement.

According to the NFHS-5, currently, **31 out of 36 states/UTs have already achieved a TFR of 2.1 or below.**

**Table 1: Trends in Total Fertility Rate in India, 1992-93 – 2019-21**



Source: International Institute for Population Sciences, National Family Health Survey

This downward trend in fertility may seem counter-intuitive as India is home to 1.37 billion people, the second largest in the world<sup>2</sup>. However, demographic data reveals that India's **decadal growth rate** i.e. the population growth rate over the 10-year period, **declined** from 21.5% from 1991-2001 to 17.7% in 2001-2011. (Census 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 2: India: Decadal Population Growth**

Year	Decadal Population Growth Rate (%)
1981	24.7
1991	23.9
2001	21.5
2011	17.7

Source: Census of India, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India

India, as a country, is inching towards **population stabilisation**, but many **inter-region and inter-district variations still exist** even in states that have attained the replacement level of fertility.

It should be noted that India's overall size of population will continue to increase for some more time as two-thirds of India's population is under 35 years (in the reproductive age)<sup>4</sup>. Even if this cohort of young population has one or two children per couple, it will still result in an increase in population size before it stops growing from 2048<sup>5</sup> onwards.

## What factors impact fertility rates?

A combination of factors, including **female literacy, workforce participation, financial independence, coupled with a delay in marriage and access to, and ability to choose from a variety of contraceptive options and other family planning services** are the primary drivers to achieving population stabilisation and reducing fertility rates.

There is a **positive correlation between increased education and reduced fertility** (the higher the level of a woman's educational attainment, the fewer children she is likely to bear). For instance, Bihar with a literacy rate among women of 57.8%<sup>6</sup>, the TFR is 3.0, while Kerala has a literacy rate among women of 98.3%<sup>7</sup>, with a TFR of 1.8.

It is evident that increased prioritisation of education and contraception for women and young couples would be the real driver for reducing fertility and not policies that dictate the family size. This view was endorsed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in a December 2020 response to the Supreme Court on a petition for introducing a population control law stating, *"The Family Welfare Programme in India is voluntary in nature, which enables couples to decide the size of their family and adopt the family planning methods, best suited to them, according to their choice, without any compulsion"*<sup>8</sup>.

## Recommendations

- We need **greater investments in the National Family Planning Programme** under the National Health Mission to **meet the contraceptive demand for 9.4% of currently married women between the ages of 15 and 49** who are not able to use any contraceptive<sup>9</sup>.
- **Greater attention needs to be paid to expanding the range and reach of contraceptive choices, especially spacing methods for young people**, given that 19.2% of the country's population is in the age group of 15-24 years<sup>10,11</sup> with 19.9% & 15.7% currently married women aged 15-19 years and aged 20-24 years respectively having an unmet need for FP spacing methods<sup>12</sup>.

## References

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