



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN
SOUTH INDIA: FROM POPULATION
CONTROL TO POPULATION
CONSERVATION**

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Context

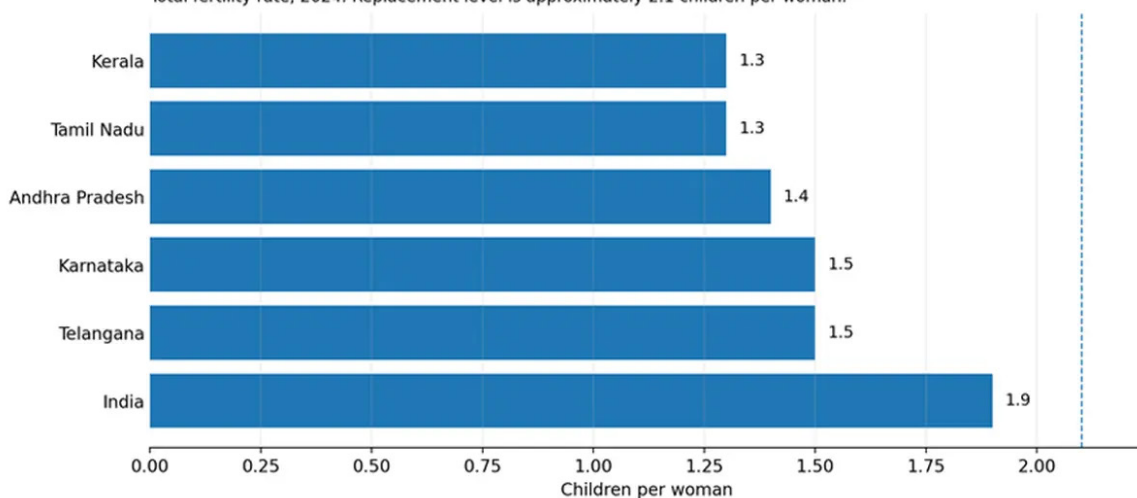
- Recently, Andhra Pradesh launched **Pillale Sampada** ('Children are Wealth') at a **World Population Day** programme, signalling a shift from population control towards addressing low fertility and ageing.

About Demographic Transition in India

- India is moving from **high birth and death rates to low fertility, mortality and population growth**.
- The SRS Statistical Report 2024 places India's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) at 1.9**, below the replacement level of about **2.1**.

All five southern States are below replacement fertility

Total fertility rate, 2024. Replacement level is approximately 2.1 children per woman.

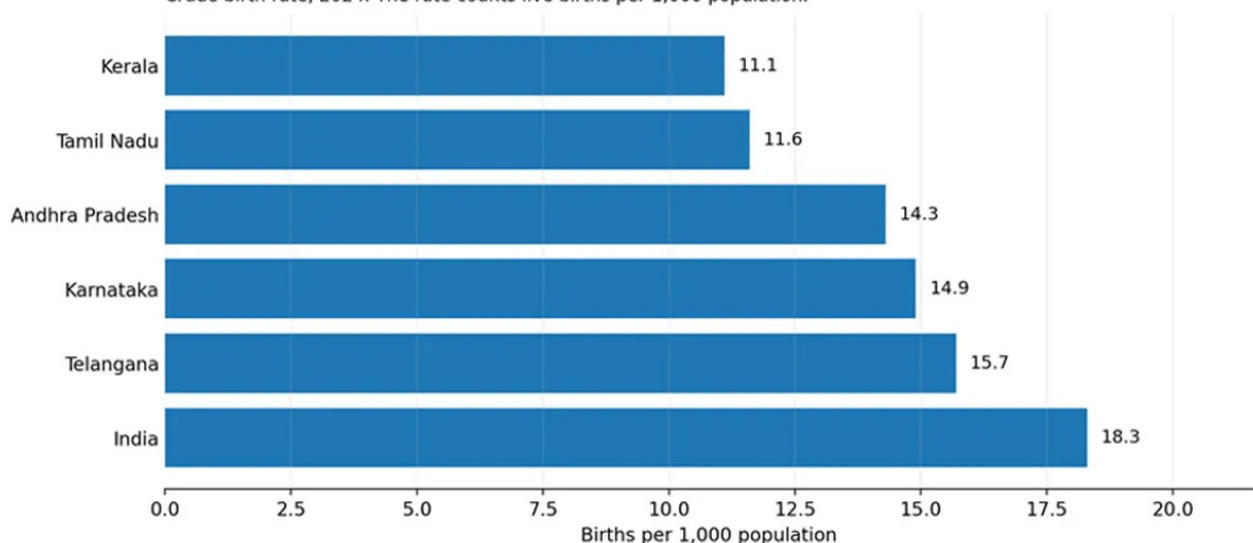


Source: Office of the Registrar General, Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2024.

- The **crude birth rate** differs from TFR because its denominator includes the entire population, whereas TFR measures births over a woman's reproductive life.
 - However, **below-replacement fertility does not mean immediate population decline**.

Birth rates in the South are well below the national average

Crude birth rate, 2024. The rate counts live births per 1,000 population.



Source: Office of the Registrar General, Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2024.

- Kerala, for instance, fell below replacement fertility in the late 1980s but continued to grow subsequently.

Demographic Transition: South India vs North India

- The South completed the fertility transition earlier, while several northern States retain younger age structures and relatively higher fertility.
- It creates a **regional demographic divergence**: the South is moving towards ageing and potentially labour shortages, while the North currently has a larger pool of young workers.
- But the South still possesses a substantial workforce.
 - ♦ In **2021**, the 15–59 age group constituted **67.1% of Andhra Pradesh, 67.5% of Telangana, 66.4% of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and 63.1% of Kerala**, compared with **64.2% nationally**.
 - ♦ By **2036**, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana are projected to remain around or above the national working-age share; Kerala falls to **59.5%** and Tamil Nadu to **63.6%**.

Advantages With South India

- It provides AP and Telangana a **demographic-dividend window**. But age structure alone cannot generate growth.
- Employment, skills, productivity, women's workforce participation and migrant-worker integration determine whether the dividend materialises.
- **Migration is another advantage**. Southern construction, manufacturing, hospitality, transport and care sectors increasingly depend on workers from younger States, an example of **replacement migration**.

Related Issues & Concerns

- **Rapid Ageing**: In 2021, persons aged more than 60 comprised **16.5% of Kerala, 13.7% of Tamil Nadu and 12.3% of AP**.
 - ♦ By 2036, this is projected at **22.8%, 20.8% and 19%**, respectively; Karnataka and Telangana reach **17.2% and 17.1%**.
 - ♦ The elderly-to-child ratio is expected to rise from **81:100 in Kerala, 69:100 in Tamil Nadu and 60:100 in AP** in 2021 to approximately **129, 134 and 121**, respectively, by 2036.
 - ♦ Telangana reaches **106:100**, Karnataka about **100:100**, while India remains younger at around **74:100**.
- **Elderly Vulnerability**: The India Ageing Report 2023 reports that **over 40% of elderly are in the poorest wealth quintile, 18.7% have no income**, and the more than 80 population could increase by around **279% between 2022 and 2050**.
 - ♦ Nearly a quarter of older persons have functional disability, potentially raising household living costs by **30–50%**.
- **Limits of Baby Bonuses**: UNFPA-linked research finds one-time incentives generally produce **modest, short-lived fertility increases**, often affecting timing rather than completed family size.
 - ♦ Childcare, parental leave, flexible work and financial support are more comprehensive levers.
- **Reproductive Choice**: AP removed its **more than 2-child local-election disqualification** in **November 2024**, followed by Telangana in **January 2026**.
 - ♦ Policy should enable people to achieve their desired family size rather than impose numerical targets.
- **Data Gap**: Current projections largely rely on **Census 2011** and pre-pandemic assumptions.
 - ♦ A **new Census** is therefore essential for updated age, migration and labour-market planning.

Way Forward: A Differentiated Policy Roadmap

- **Kerala & Tamil Nadu**: Prioritise geriatric healthcare, long-term/home care, social pensions and senior-friendly infrastructure.
 - ♦ Kerala's **2026–27 Elderly Budget** and its **May 2026 Department of Senior Citizens Welfare** orders indicate this direction.
- **Andhra Pradesh & Telangana**: Maximise the current demographic dividend through jobs, skilling, women's employment and migrant integration rather than relying primarily on birth incentives.
- **Karnataka**: Combine workforce productivity with early preparation for rising old-age dependency.
- **All Southern States**: Expand childcare, parental leave, reproductive healthcare, infertility services and portable welfare for migrants.

- Promote a **'second demographic dividend'** by enabling healthy older persons to work longer and deploy accumulated savings productively.

Conclusion

- **Pillale Sampada** highlights a genuine demographic challenge, but the immediate issue is not a shortage of children, it is preparing for **fewer young people, more elderly citizens and a changing workforce**.
- A sustainable population policy should focus on three outcomes i.e. **desired fertility, productive employment and dignified ageing**.
- The South can therefore become a laboratory for managing India's post-demographic-transition future.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the emerging demographic challenges in Southern India and suggest a differentiated policy roadmap to harness the demographic dividend while preparing for population ageing.

Source: Frontline

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