

# In fact

Unlock the power of data for social change

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***‘In Fact’ is a quarterly newsletter by ISDM DataSights. [ISDM DataSights](#) is a pioneering single-window SDG data platform that democratises data access for the social sector, developed by the Indian School of Development Management (ISDM), and powered by Capgemini.***

## A Story in Numbers

### Double trouble: Why India urgently needs policies to address the challenges of both its youth, and elderly population

By: [Siddharth Dhote](#) and [Sreya R Menon](#)

In 2025, India’s population stands at approximately 1.45 billion. Nearly 68% of this is people in the working-age group (15–64 years), while 7% are aged above 65<sup>1</sup>. This World Population Day, we examine how these demographics are set to change across the country, and how they need to be tackled via policy.

Over the decades, India’s success with family welfare programs and an increase in better healthcare facilities has meant that both fertility and mortality rates are on the decline. As a result, our demographic dividend — the period when the working-age population outnumbers dependents — which began in the early 1980s, is expected to end by 2040. This means that over the next 15 years, we will see a gradual shrinking of the workforce, alongside a steady rise in the elderly population. The numbers tell us that:

- As per Census projections<sup>1</sup>, the proportion of working age individuals will increase from 64 per cent in 2011 to 70 per cent in 2036.
- In the same period, the population above 65 will nearly double.
- Meanwhile, the percentage of people below the age of 14 is likely to fall from 31 in 2011, to 20 in 2036.
- Within the working age population, the share of the youth (15-29) is also expected to decline from 28 per cent in 2011 to 23 per cent by 2036.

Based on these projections, India is in the final stages of reaping its demographic dividend and has a once in a lifetime opportunity to increase and sustain its GDP growth, reduce poverty, and enhance the human capabilities of its people<sup>2-3</sup>.

### Age matters

To better understand the policy requirements in the context of this changing demographic, let us look at the three broad stages of transition in the age structure of the population.

In Stage 1, young people in the population are dependent on the working age population. These young people will eventually move on to become the working age population. In Stage 2, the share of the working age population increases. Stage 3 is characterised by a rising old age population, and high old age dependency ratios<sup>4</sup>. Most states are considered to be in phases II and III and are expected to remain in these stages for the next two to three decades<sup>2</sup>.

Across India, while the proportion of working-age individuals is expected to peak and decline, the elderly population will increase steadily — from less than 5% at the start of the transition to nearly 10% in the coming decades <sup>1</sup>. This demographic inversion will put pressure on healthcare, pensions, and support systems, and demands a reorientation of policy priorities. To reap benefits during the demographic window of opportunity, it is critical to make appropriate investments in education and health <sup>5-6</sup>.

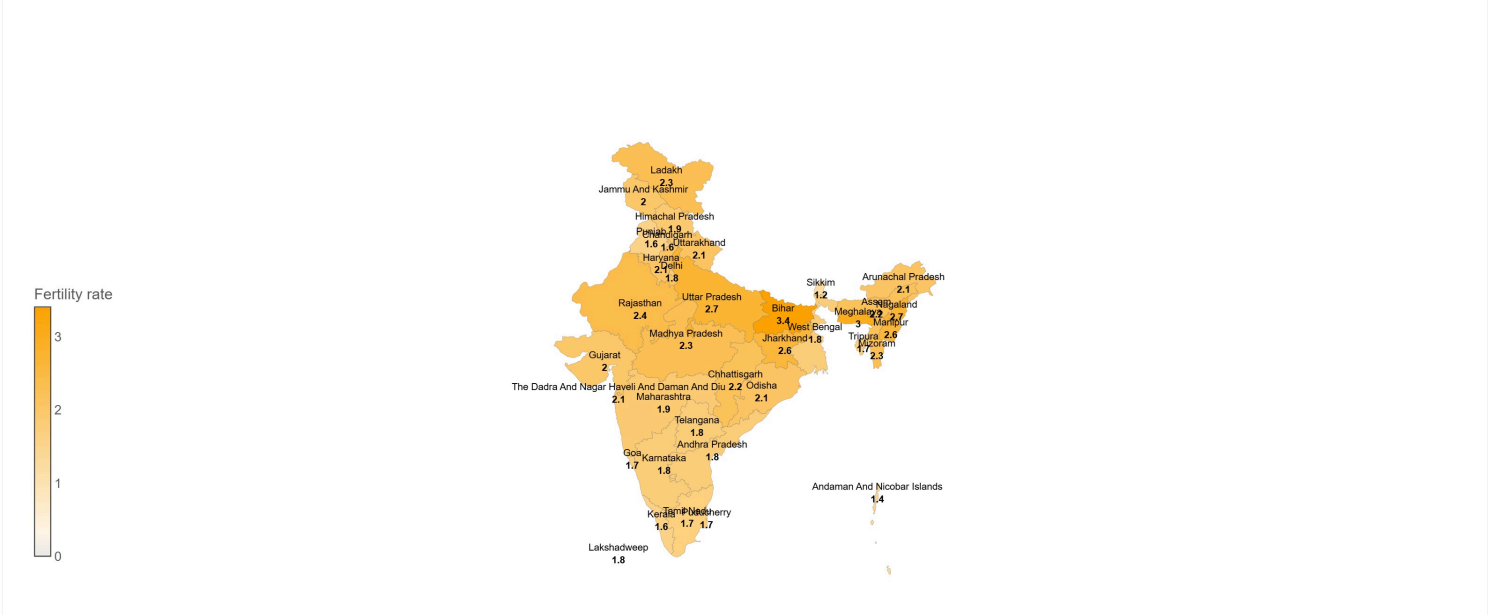
### Regional disparities

A higher fertility rate increases the number of children, while lower fertility can reduce the number of children and eventually the working population, which will lead to an ageing population. Data on fertility rates between 2015-2019 tells us that these demographic transitions are not uniform across states.

Some southern and western states, like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, have already moved below replacement fertility rates, indicating advanced stages of ageing – where the older population will increase, along with a demand for a youth workforce that will not be available in sufficient numbers.

Figure 1a: Statewise Fertility Rate (2015)

Created by: Siddharth Dhote | On: 07/07/2025

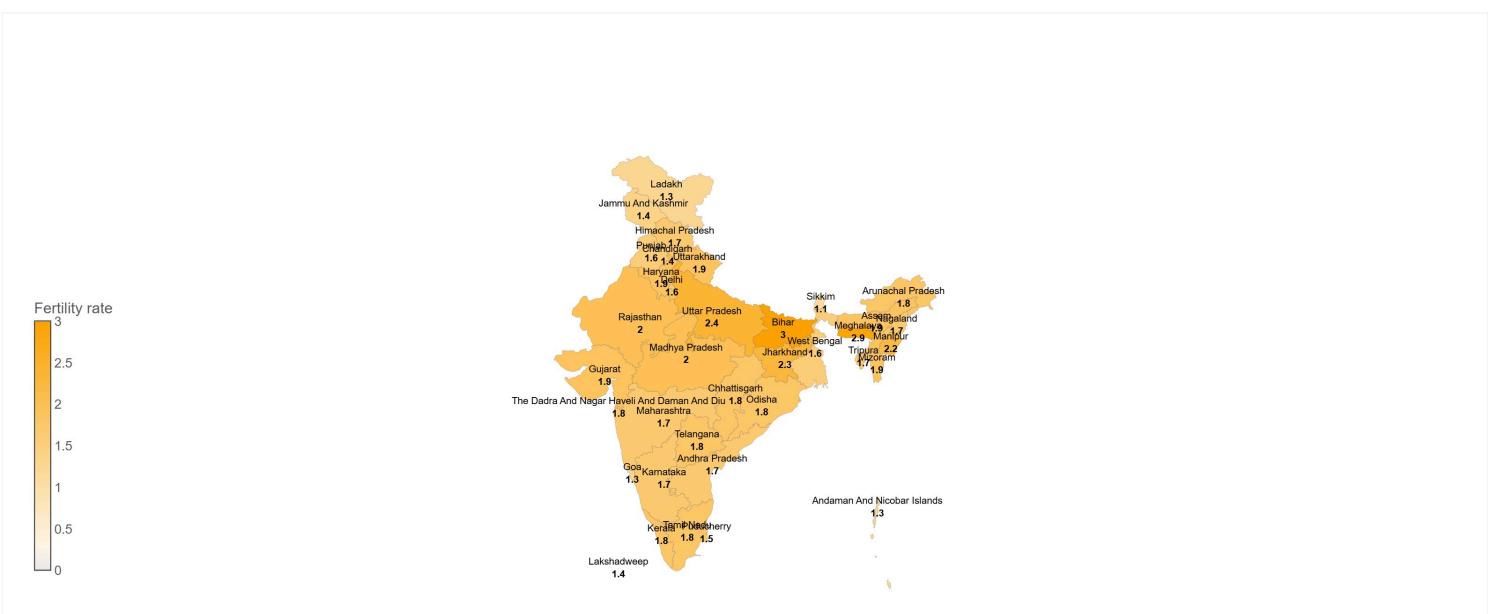


Data source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 – (State) (2015,2019), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 – (State) (2019)

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Figure 1b: Statewise Fertility Rate (2019)

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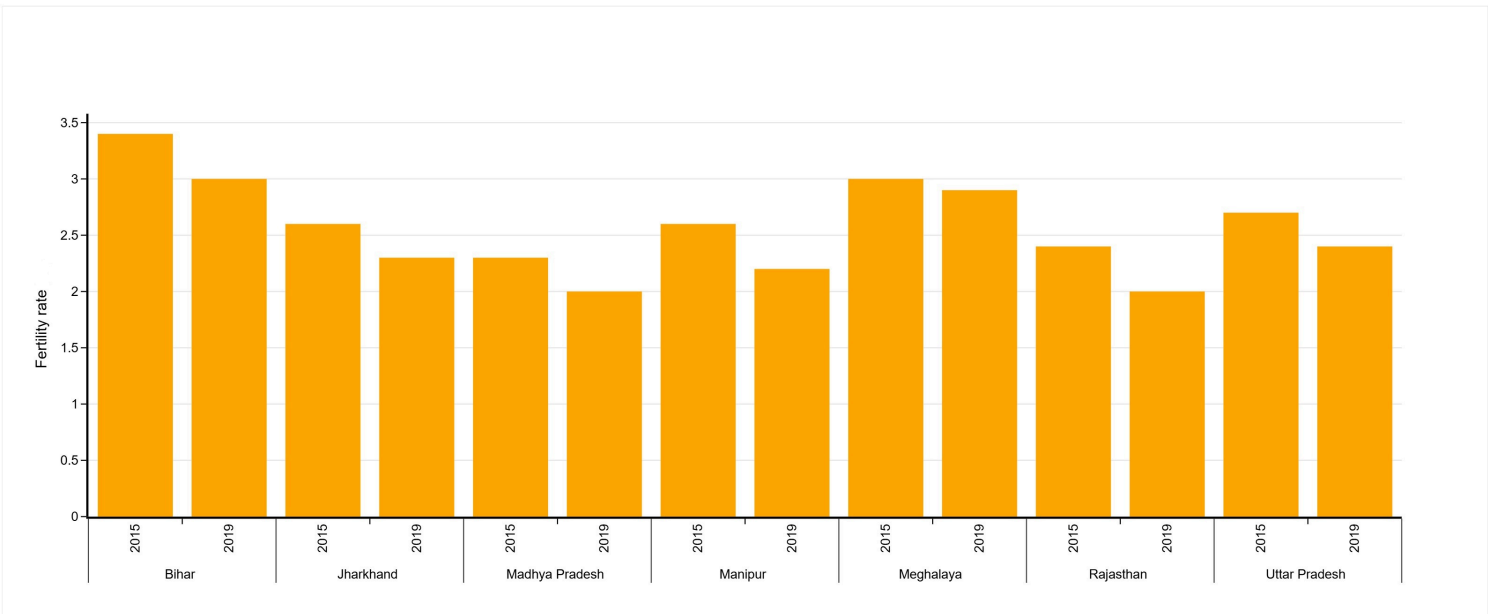
Data source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 – (State) (2015,2019), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 – (State) (2019)

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Others, particularly in the East, Centre, and Northeast, such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Manipur, and Meghalaya have fertility rates above replacement rates and will continue to experience youth bulges.

Fig 2: States with Fertility Rates Above Replacement Rate (2015, 2019)

Created by: Siddharth Dhote | On: 30/06/2025



Data source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 – (State) (2015,2019), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 – (State) (2019)

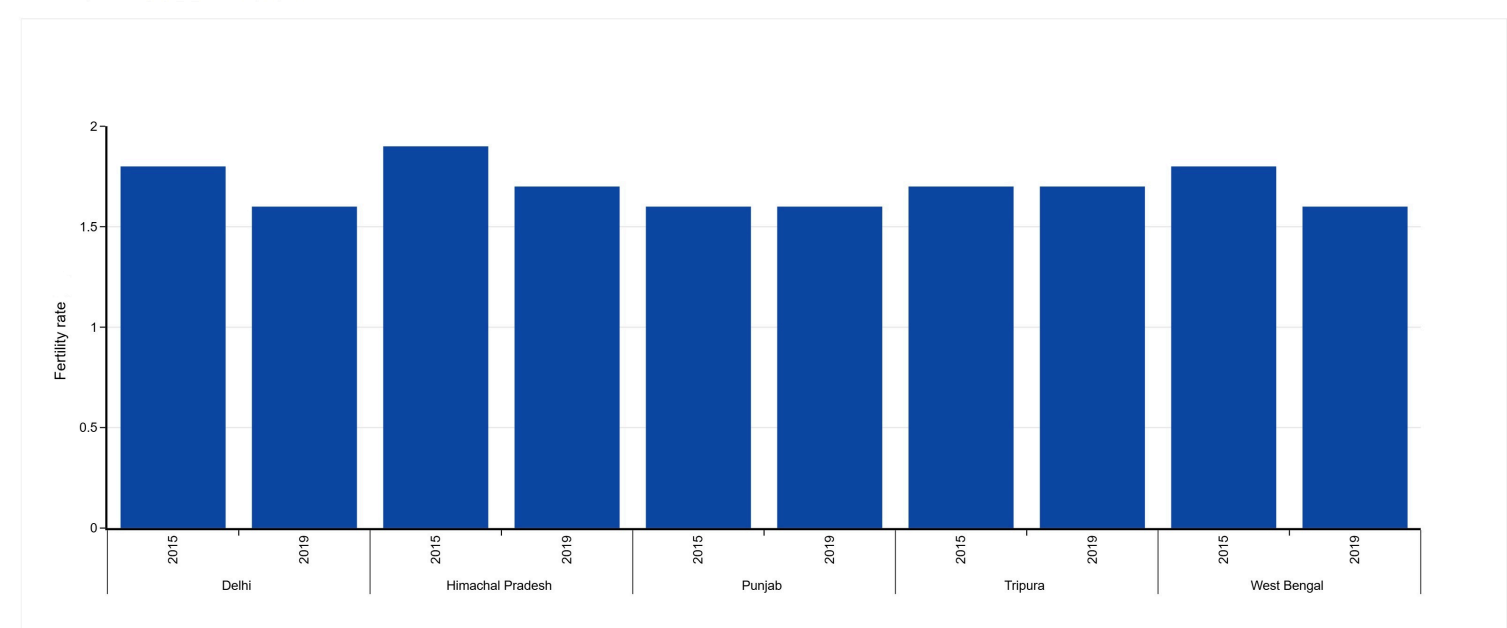
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On the other hand, states such as West Bengal, Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Tripura are experiencing a declining youth share and more ageing, increasing elderly care demands.



**Fig 3: States with Fertility Rates Indicating Ageing Populations (2015, 2019)**

Created by: Siddharth Dhote | On: 30/06/2025



Data source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 - (State)(2015,2019), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 - (State)(2019)

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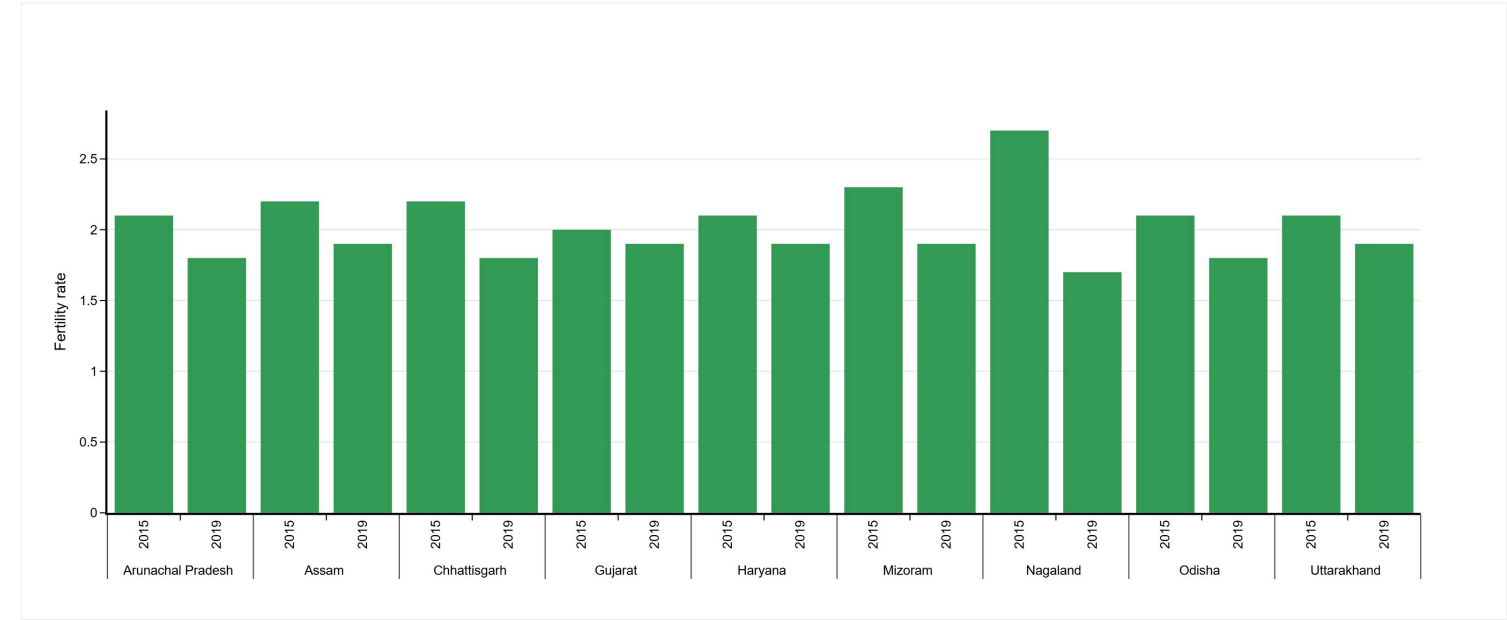
Such regional variations necessitate decentralised and tailored policy approaches, rather than a one-size-fits-all model.

### The future needs preparation

States such as Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, and Nagaland are entering a unique phase of both ageing and a stable youth and working age population. These regions require nuanced strategies that support both ends of the population spectrum.

**Fig 4: States with Fertility Rates Indicating Double Burden (2015, 2019)**

Created by: Siddharth Dhote | On: 30/06/2025



Data source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 - (State)(2015,2019), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 - (State)(2019)

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In all states with a dual demographic burden, increased spend on primary, secondary, and tertiary care healthcare policies will be helpful. If the healthcare workforce is revitalised, it will help take care of an ageing population. At the same time, investments must be made in skilling and education, and in generating employment opportunities based on each state's unique natural resources, level of industrialisation, infrastructure, and socio-economic needs.

India's pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 requires that policy action be twofold: invest in youth through education, skill-building, entrepreneurship, and employment, while supporting the elderly with accessible healthcare, social security, and dignity-focused community care models.

### References

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## Keep Exploring

Now, it's your turn.

For the next edition of In Fact by ISDM DataSights, explore the indicators on education and literacy, and tell us how your state does, in time for International Literacy Day (September 8). Send us your charts and visualisations at [datasights@isdms.org.in](mailto:datasights@isdms.org.in), pronto!

## News & Updates

On June 26, ISDM DataSights, in partnership with Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA), conducted a roadshow at the Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati. Sixty passionate NGO leaders across the North-East attended this live, follow-along workshop on using the platform. They learnt to visualise data, draw insights, and make evidence-informed decisions. You can too - email us at [datasights@isdms.org.in](mailto:datasights@isdms.org.in) if you'd like us to conduct a workshop for your organisation!

### A snapshot of the ISDM DataSights roadshow in Guwahati



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