

POPULATION CONTROL AND YOUTH BULGE

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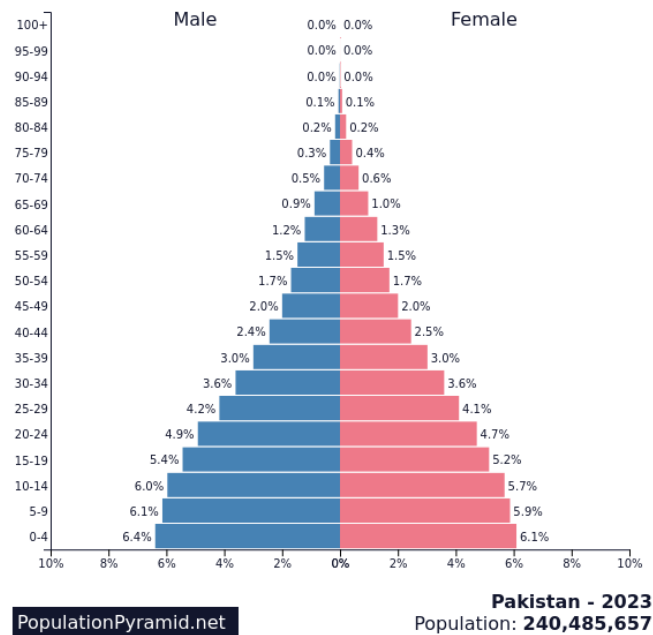
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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



In 2023, Pakistan's population surpassed an astonishing 240 million and is anticipated to further climb to 245 million by July 2024, as per UN projections.¹ Notably, two-thirds of this demographic are aged 24 or below. Two-thirds of this population are aged 24 or under. The phenomenon known as a youth bulge arises when advances in medical care lead to a decline in infant mortality rates, while concurrently, high fertility rates persist. The crucial factor in mitigating this demographic challenge lies in ensuring gainful employment opportunities for young adults entering the workforce. Successful employment for this demographic can effectively reduce a country's dependency ratio. Conversely, a surge in unproductive youth could transform the youth bulge into a catalyst for social and political unrest. Therefore, addressing Pakistan's youth employment rate requires focused attention to prevent potential socio-political upheaval.

¹ "Pakistan Populations 1950-2024," *Macrotrends*, 2024, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/PAK/pakistan/population#:~:text=United%20Nations%20projections%20are%20also,a%201.91%25%20increase%20from%202021.>



Source: Population Pyramid 2

Literacy and Population Bulge in Pakistan

Ensuring widespread education is a key catalyst for a nation's developmental progress as it opens doors to numerous opportunities. Inadequate education and low literacy rates are associated with diminished decision-making abilities. Presently, only 6% of the youth population can avail themselves of higher education, while a significant 29% lack access to any form of education.³ Furthermore, according to the Planning Commission report Pakistan's literacy rate stands at 46%, where the literacy rate is at 80% in urban areas, but only 20% in rural settlements.⁴

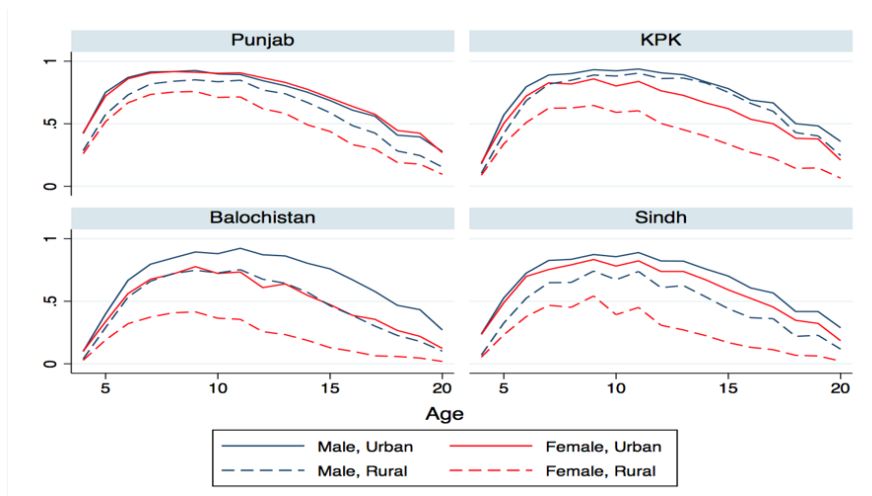
The disparity in this situation is notable across provinces, with women consistently experiencing the greatest hardships in every scenario. The extent of these variations may differ among provinces, but it is unmistakably evident that women bear the brunt of these challenges, irrespective of regional nuances. Despite government and private organization efforts, various challenges continue to exist that prevent females from fully participating in society, such as cultural barriers, poverty and low income, gender roles, lack of infrastructure, and the presence of few female teachers.

² "Pakistan 2023," 2023, <https://www.populationpyramid.net/pakistan/2023/>

³ Dr Hafiz A. Pasha, "Pakistan National Human Development Report 2020," *United Nations Development Programme*, 2020, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/pk/NHDR-Inequality-2020---Overview-Low-Res.pdf>.

⁴ Askari A, Jawed A & Askari S, "Women Education in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities," *Research Gate*, December 1, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369911557_Women_Education_in_Pakistan_Challenges_and_Opportunities

The graph below depicts that in all provinces, girls are less likely to be in school compared to boys.



Source: Data taken from the Pakistan Social Living Standards Survey 2018-2019 ⁵

There is an overall lack of educational infrastructure present in the country with poorly equipped staff and qualified teachers. Due to conservative values, parents prefer to send girls to schools with female teachers. The number of well-qualified female teachers is very limited, which adds to the list of obstacles present for women to receive education.

Economic, Security Liability and Brain Drain

The loss of human capital as a result of unemployed youth results in an underutilization of the workforce and makes these individuals rely on their families or the government for financial support. This adds to the financial strain on resources of the government and diverts funds that could have been invested in educational projects, improving infrastructure and other developmental initiatives. Furthermore, there is a loss in productivity and innovation when the young people of a nation are unable to access the opportunities required to gain valuable work experience and develop skills that can help contribute fresh ideas to the economy.

The detrimental impact on the country's stability is equally profound in terms of the social costs incurred. This situation not only elevates poverty levels but also steers individuals toward a trajectory of criminal activities, and even propels youth towards drug abuse. Moreover, Pakistan's younger generation is facing an escalating exposure to radicalization, religious extremism, and terrorism. Alarming, a significant portion of the educated youth demographic has become a target for extremist groups and organizations. A lack of socio-economic opportunities for a vast majority of

⁵ Juan D. Baron & May Bend, "Facing the Challenges of Girls' Education in Pakistan," *World Bank Blogs*, March 5, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/facing-challenges-girls-education-pakistan>

society has led to such social dilemmas where people mobilize and express their frustrations through acts of terrorism.⁶ This adds to government expenditure on rehabilitation projects and drug use prevention campaigns, as well as on law enforcement.

The lack of opportunities present has beckoned many Pakistanis to look for employment overseas. In 2022, Pakistan saw more than 765,000 citizens leave the country, one of the highest numbers to leave in many years. Among them, nearly 92,000 are skilled and highly educated people.⁷

The government of Pakistan can effectively transform its youth population from a potential liability into a valuable asset for the nation's progress and stability by adopting several sort and long-term measures;

1. *Comprehensive Education Reforms:*

- Implement reforms to enhance the accessibility and quality of secondary and tertiary education.
- Develop vocational training programs to equip youth with practical skills and enhance employability.

2. *Strategic Population Control Initiatives:*

- Launch targeted campaigns promoting family planning and reproductive health to curb the youth bulge.
- Provide accessible and affordable family planning services to empower individuals with reproductive choices.

3. *Youth Employment Programs:*

- Establish initiatives that promote youth employment through partnerships with the private sector and NGOs.
- Encourage entrepreneurship by facilitating access to startup funding and mentorship programs.

⁶ Stefan Malthaner & Peter Waldmann, "The Radical Millieu: Conceptualizing The Supportive Social Environment of Terrorist Groups," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2014, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2014.962441>

⁷ Waqas Ahmed, "Country's Brain Drain Situation Accelerated in 2022," *Tribune*, December 12, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2390704/countrys-brain-drain-situation-accelerated-in-2022>

4. *Social and Cultural Awareness Campaigns:*

- Launch awareness campaigns addressing social norms and cultural barriers that hinder youth development.
- Promote gender equality and empower women to ensure the holistic development of the youth population.

5. *Investment in Technology and Innovation:*

- Foster an environment conducive to technological advancements and innovation.
- Facilitate the integration of technology into education, providing youth with skills relevant to the evolving job market.

6. *Community Engagement and Support Programs:*

- Establish community-based support programs focusing on mental health, counseling, and career guidance.
- Encourage local community involvement in addressing specific challenges faced by the youth.

7. *Policy Focus on Sustainable Development:*

- Formulate and implement policies that prioritize sustainable development, considering the long-term impact on the environment, economy, and society.
- Allocate resources for projects that promote environmental conservation, renewable energy, and resilient infrastructure.

Conclusion

Political stability is vital for good policy implementation. Pakistan has witnessed frequently changing governments. Different policies were introduced under each new government that was axed by the successive leadership.⁸ Policies were unable to take root and bring strong results. At present, due to economic setbacks being faced by the government, there are insufficient funds that can be invested

⁸ Samina Mahsud-Dornan, "Pakistan, Population Programmes and Progress," *Ulster Medical Journal*, 2007, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2075591/>

in social programs. Hence, social policies need assistance in the form of partnerships with private or international organizations.

Moreover, policymakers must underscore the significance of formulating policies that yield enduring societal advantages rather than opting for short-term gains. In the context of Pakistan, a nation grappling with a confluence of climate, social, and economic challenges, prioritizing sustainable development is of paramount importance. Specifically, implementing effective population control policies and youth skill initiatives emerges as a critical need for a country like Pakistan, characterized by a burgeoning youth population. By emphasizing and investing in these initiatives, Pakistan can not only address demographic challenges but also harness the potential of its youth for long-term socio-economic prosperity. This strategic approach ensures that policies extend beyond immediate gains, contributing substantially to the nation's resilience in the face of multifaceted challenges.