

# The socio-economic impacts of population explosion in Pakistan



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## OUTLINE

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**P**akistan came into being in August 1947 as home to around 75 million people. According to the census of 1951, its population was 75.7 million out of which 33.7 million people inhabited West Pakistan, now called Pakistan. According to the last census conducted in 2017, Pakistan's population was 207.7 million. Though a

fresh census is yet to be made, our population is estimated to be above 220 million as of 2020 making Pakistan the 5th largest country in the world. When East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan in 1971 to emerge on the map of the world as Bangladesh, the population that inhabited West Pakistan was slightly less than 60 million. Bangladesh, which had approximately 5.5 million more people than Pakistan in 1971, now has a population of 164.7 million whereas Pakistan has crossed a population count of 220 million. In the fifty-year period from 1971 to 2021, Bangladesh has added 100 million people to its population, whereas Pakistan's increase is above 160 million. In the same fifty-year period, Germany's population has increased by only 0.4 m, France's by 1 m, United Kingdom's by 1.1 m, Australia's by 1.2 m and Russia's by 1.3 m. Pakistan has the highest population growth rate at around 1.90 per cent. Each family in Pakistan on average has 3.1 children. This population explosion in Pakistan has gravely impacted Pakistani society in a number of ways. It would not be wrong to assert that the population explosion is the root cause of all the major socio-economic problems in Pakistan. (255 words)

Major factors responsible for high population growth in Pakistan are high fertility, low contraceptive prevalence rate, lack of awareness about family planning, illiteracy especially of women and lack of women empowerment due to which a wife cannot impact her husband's decision to have more children, declining mortality owing to better healthcare as compared to the past, custom of early marriages, son preference, poverty, religious belief that giving birth to more children is appreciable in Islam, and lack of recreational activities. In Pakistan people generally believe that having more children has nothing to do with increasing poverty as financial matters are only decided by God. They rather believe that more children promise more opportunities for more earning. "When a child is born, he or she has one mouth to be fed, but two hands to earn" is a proverb to be used by the common people, especially in the rural areas which accommodate 62 per cent of the population of Pakistan. Hence, defeating the hydra-headed monster of overpopulation is indeed a Herculean task. At present, the monster of overpopulation is causing a number of socio-economic problems which are spiralling down the country towards further depths. (190 words)

One of the major impacts of population explosion is blind urbanisation. The village offers very limited economic opportunities and scant facilities of life like healthcare, education, vocational training, et cetera. With the fastest increase in the rural population, the trend of migration of people from rural areas to cities also increases. In 1971, around 75 per cent of Pakistan's population lived in rural areas, but with the exponential growth in the population of rural areas, more and more people started migrating to cities, and now the rural population is barely above 62 per cent. This mass urbanisation has hurt Pakistan like a double-edged sword: migration from villages causes a shortage of labour force to work on farms causing less agricultural growth, and it puts unmanageable strain on the resources and infrastructure of urban destinations. Pakistan is basically an agricultural economy, but now the share of its agriculture in its GDP has substantially reduced from above 32 per cent in the 1950s to 19.2 per cent in 2021 according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2021. The same document has counted labour shift as one of the major reasons for the fall in agriculture growth. (195 words)

As has been mentioned in the previous paragraph, the rampant migration of people from rural areas to cities is causing innumerable socio-economic problems in cities. The people immigrating into cities cause unplanned construction and commercial activities. The majority of the migrating families live in densely populated slums with very pathetic living conditions and a sheer lack of civic amenities. Usually, the big cities of P;g. Inadequate health facilities walpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, and Quetta are at the receiving end. Life in such big cities is badly affected by all forms of pollution, seasonal epidemics, shortage of energy resources, substandard food, and lack of educational institutions for ever-increasing children in such areas. The increasing urban populations cause unmanageable traffic on city roads, inadequate transport, lack of space for car parking and overcrowded markets, poor sewerage systems and a rise in the crime rate. Another problem related to urbanisation is the sprawling of cities over arable lands and forests causing the shrinking of agricultural lands and forests and damaging the natural environment. (173 words)

When it comes to the effects of over-population on cities, the exponential rise in the crime rate in the cities is the most worrying problem. Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, had a population of 0.4 million at the time of Pakistan's inception, but in the national census of 2017, its population was counted to be above 16 million. Karachi is afflicted with street crimes like mobile phone snatching and robberies, and organised crimes like car-lifting, kidnapping for ransom, extortion and target-killing. The Express Tribune reported on 21 February 2022 that more than 50,000 incidents of street crime

were reported in Karachi during the first eight months of 2021. During this time period, Karachi residents were deprived of 34,181 motorcycles, 14,578 mobile phones and 1,268 cars. More tragically, 54 people lost their lives while hundreds received injuries. Lahore is also not behind Karachi in such crimes. According to the Dawn of 2 January 2022, some 3,360 robbery cases were registered in Lahore in 2020, while the number increased to 9,308 in 2021. Similarly, thefts also increased from 92 in 2020 to 199 in 2021. On the whole, with a 57 per cent increase in crime rate in 2021, Lahore city's crime figures crossed 200,000 cases. Likewise, the crime rate is also increasing in other big cities. (230 words)

Population explosion has also made it extremely difficult for successive governments to stabilise Pakistan's economy. It depends on loans taken from institutions like the IMF, Asian Development Bank and other foreign countries to make its fiscal budgets. Pakistan has taken IMF loans for 22 times to evade an impending default or to bring its economy out of some deep pit. As a matter of fact, our economy is more often than not dependent on foreign countries or lending institutions. These loans and financial support always come with strings attached to them. Consequently, Pakistan has to toe the line of the lenders while making domestic and foreign policies. We have to fight others' wars, sacrifice our soldiers, afford huge losses of infrastructure and suffer the worst waves of terrorism in the world. Pakistan's participation in the USSR-Afghan war (1979-1989) and the so-called war on terror (2001-2021) are examples of how the country had to dance to others' tune. If Pakistan were not dependent on foreign countries' financial support, it could have decided its foreign policies differently and faced less devastating repercussions. (180 words)

One of the gravest impacts of population explosion on the Pakistani society is an alarming rise in poverty. As mentioned earlier, when population increases disproportionately, the available natural resources and food produced in the country become less per capita. Hence, the economy of the country fails to keep pace with the demands of the fast-increasing population, and its per capita income is reduced. Though there are many factors to play their role in poverty in the very complex world of today, population is undoubtedly a major factor. As of 2019, the people earning less than \$1.9 a day and hence living below the poverty line were 21.9 per cent. On average, more than one-fifth of the population of Pakistan is generally bound to live in abject poverty. According to the World Bank, around 40 per cent of the households in Pakistan suffer from moderate to acute food insecurity. The per capita availability of water which used to be 5650 cubic metres in the 1950s has now come down to less than 1000 cubic metres.

Inadequate availability of water will drastically impact the agriculture and in turn worsen the problem of food insecurity. The water crisis has already put the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan at loggerheads with Punjab, which they blame for usurping their share of water. (220 words)

Over-population is also the major cause of widespread illiteracy and poor quality of education. There are more than 80 million children in Pakistan. Since there is intense poverty in Pakistan, the government is not in a position to allocate sufficient budget to provide education to all the children, depriving more than 23 million children of the right of education. The average literacy rate in Pakistan in the last three decades has been below 60 per cent. The uneducated children grow up to add to the unemployable adults to create poverty embracing families. Hence, overpopulation, poverty and illiteracy make a never-ending cycle. On the other hand, those who are provided education in public schools are also not very fortunate as the standard of public schools is usually very pathetic. The teacher to student ratio is very high due to which the classrooms are overcrowded. Most of the schools are without proper buildings and those that have buildings lack teaching aids, science laboratories and equipment, and competent teachers. The abject poverty compels around one-tenth of the children to get free education from religious seminaries whose religious syllabi are out of pace with the modern world. The only few that get quality education are the ones that hail from upper middle class or elite class families. (215 words)

Pakistan's population explosion has also incapacitated its governments to provide adequate healthcare to its people. There is an acute shortage of government hospitals, clinics and qualified physicians. In Pakistan, close to one child in six dies before the age of five. The nutritional status of children is very poor due to which 35 percent of them are underweight, more than 50 per cent suffer from stunted growth and around 9 per cent from emaciation. Each day, around 1,100 Pakistani children under five years die of diarrhoea and water-borne diseases. According to a UNICEF report released in February 2018, Pakistan has the worst infant mortality rate in the world. A baby born in Pakistan faces one in 22 chances of death, while a newborn in Japan has only one in 1,111 risks of dying. There are 1.12 physicians for 1000 people in Pakistan, whereas, on average, there are 5 physicians per 1000 people in Europe. The hospitals in cities are overcrowded though they also lack quality healthcare facilities and equipment. The condition in the rural areas is worst because usually there are no fully equipped hospitals in a radius of one hundred kilometres around most of the villages across the country. (200 words)

As a matter of fact, population explosion is the root cause of many a socio-economic problem of Pakistan, and to put the country on the road to real progress, the nation needs to take immediate remedial measures. Population growth cannot be reduced by any short-term measures. It needs a long-term programme. First of all, the government should take a page out of Bangladesh's book as it has successfully checked population after its establishment. Their government made a comprehensive programme involving several ministries and departments and social institutions. For example, the education ministry was tasked to enrol more and more girls and add special education on family planning and population in the curriculum. Similarly, the ministry of rural development was given the target of increasing participation of young women in economic activities because a working woman cannot afford taking care of more children and, therefore, bears fewer children. Similarly, the government departments collaborated with NGOs and the private sector to create awareness about family planning and provide assistance to couples for the use of contraceptives. The religious scholars and clerics play a significant role in both Bangladeshi and Pakistani societies, and people follow their advice with religious zeal. Therefore, the government should also involve them to educate the masses about the small size of a family. (215 words)

Since Pakistan has not been able to reduce population growth rate, and overpopulation has become the gravest of all causes of its economic decline, taking certain tough measures like imposing a policy of limiting the number of children per family to two or three should be considered seriously. Since early marriages are also a big cause of large families, the government should strictly impose the law against child marriages. In addition to all this, introducing more and more women to economic activities will also make them keep the size of their family small. To check the exponential increase in population, the government should devise smart policies and implement them with utter seriousness. It is basically the poor strata of society that causes overpopulation, therefore incentivising the small families by offering the people a small plot or a job or free education to the kids can also be considered, and budget can be arranged with the help of UNESCO or other foreign donors as they also understand that one country's overpopulation does not impact only that country but also the world at large. (180 words)

Population explosion is undoubtedly the root cause of Pakistan's poor economy and many a socio-economic problem. In Pakistan, people's gender preference for male children, illiteracy, lack of awareness, early marriages and the wrong concept of having more male children to ensure economic growth and stability of the family are the main

causes that contribute to the exponential growth of population. Pakistan's successive governments' failure to address the problem of overpopulation has made it a hydra-headed monster, whose one head is quickly replaced by another when cut off. Overpopulation in Pakistan has given birth to a number of socio-economic problems which include large-scale urbanisation, urban sprawls, widespread poverty, unmitigated illiteracy, lack of resources and poor law and order situation. Most of these problems complement one another and cannot be dealt with exclusively because their root cause is fully functional. The government and the civil society need to work hand in hand to check the rapid growth of population. Only the masses hold the key to check overpopulation. The government should make comprehensive and all-encompassing policies and programmes to educate the masses to ebb the tide of overpopulation, and every sensible, educated and aware person of the society should play his or her role to spread awareness about the short-term and long-term benefits of a small family.(220 words)

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(Total words: 2540)

