

**MAINS iMPACT 2025****12-01-2026**

INDIAN YOUTH

SYLLABUS:

GS 1 > Indian Society >> Population and related issues

REFERENCE NEWS:

National Youth Day (Yuva Diwas) is observed across India on **January 12, 2026**, commemorating the birth anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda**. The day serves not just as a celebration but as a moment of reflection on the values, direction, and responsibilities of India's youth, recognising them as the foundation of the nation's future.

- Declared in **1984** by the Government of India, the day aims to inspire young people by connecting them to Vivekananda's ideals of **self-confidence, discipline, character-building, and service to the nation**.
- His enduring message, "**Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached**", continues to motivate generations.
- National Youth Day is marked through **debates, speeches, essay competitions, youth conferences, seminars, workshops, and community service programmes**, with organisations like **NCC and NSS** playing a key role. Several states also host **National Youth Festival** events to showcase youth talent and ideas.
- In today's era of **social media influence, instant gratification, and distractions**, the relevance of the day has grown.
- It reminds young Indians that **education goes beyond employment, success is not merely material, and confidence must be guided by discipline and social responsibility**, reinforcing the timeless relevance of Vivekananda's teachings.

YOUTH OF INDIA, DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE:

India's youth generation occupies a **strategic yet fragile position**, simultaneously representing the country's greatest strength and its most urgent policy challenge. With the right investments, India can convert its youth bulge into a **demographic dividend**; failure to do so risks a **demographic burden**.

- **Largest youth population globally:** India has **~371 million youth (15–29 years)**, the highest in the world, according to **UNICEF**.
- **Population share:** Youth constituted **27.2% of India's population in 2021**, projected to decline to **22.7% by 2036** (Technical Group on Population Projections, 2021).
- **Demographic dividend window:** India's dividend phase (2005–2055) is **time-bound**, demanding immediate policy action to translate numbers into productivity.

- **GDP boost potential:** Strategic investment in youth (education, skilling, health, jobs) could add **USD 1 trillion to GDP by 2030** (World Bank & NITI Aayog).

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN YOUTH:

Economic Significance: Engine of Growth and Productivity

- **Demographic Dividend:** India has **~371 million youth (15–29 years)**, the largest globally (UNICEF). A lower dependency ratio increases savings, investments, and consumption. **World Bank & NITI Aayog** estimate that effective utilisation of youth potential could add **USD 1 trillion to India's GDP by 2030**.
- **Labour Market & Global Workforce Advantage:** India's young workforce offsets ageing populations in **Japan and Europe**, strengthening India's role in global manufacturing and services. India is a preferred destination for **outsourcing, IT services, and manufacturing relocation**.
 - Germany's skill mobility initiatives increasingly tap Indian youth for healthcare and engineering roles.

Innovation & Entrepreneurship: Drivers of New India

- **Startup & innovation engine:** Youth-led entrepreneurship, supported by initiatives like Startup India, is driving India's digital and innovation economy. India has emerged as one of the world's largest startup ecosystems, largely powered by young founders and digital-native workers.
- Programs like Startup India and Mudra Yojana encourage youth-led enterprise. India is among the **top global startup ecosystems**, largely powered by first-generation young entrepreneurs.
- Platforms like UPI, ed-tech and health-tech startups scaled rapidly due to **youth digital adoption and innovation**.

Social Significance: Agents of Change and Inclusion

- **Gender & Social Justice:** Youth-led movements challenge patriarchy, caste barriers, and discriminatory norms. Increasing assertion for **gender equality, reproductive rights, and freedom of choice**.
 - The **Pinjra Tod movement** highlighted youth resistance to restrictive gender norms in higher education spaces.
- **Community Development:** Youth participation in **NSS, NCC, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** drives behavioural change and grassroots leadership. Also youth-led initiatives are strong towards climate change activism and sustainable development. It also is strong in spreading social initiatives of education, child marriage, acid attacks, LGBTQ+.

Cultural Significance: Soft Power and Identity

- Indian youth shape global perceptions through **films, music, sports, digital content, and social media**. Youth creativity fuels India's **soft power diplomacy**.
- Global popularity of Indian cinema, music remixes, yoga, and digital influencers reflects youth-driven cultural export.

Democratic & Political Significance

- Youth engagement strengthens **democratic participation and accountability**.
- Rising voter awareness, issue-based activism, and digital campaigns are youth-led.

- Youth participation in electoral processes and social campaigns enhances policy responsiveness and transparency.

Human Capital & Skill Development

- Youth are the primary beneficiaries and implementers of **NEP 2020**, skilling missions, and apprenticeship programs.
- Young workers drive productivity in **manufacturing, services, defence, and emerging technologies**.
- Apprenticeship models under PM-NAPS link youth skills directly to industry needs, improving employability.
- Youth dominance in sports enhances national identity and international recognition.
- India's improved Olympic and international sports performance is largely driven by young athletes from diverse backgrounds.

Strategic & Geopolitical Significance

- India's youthful population gives it a **long-term strategic advantage** over ageing powers.
- Youth power India's defence forces, cyber capabilities, space sector, and innovation-led diplomacy.
- A young demographic ensures sustained military readiness, technological adaptation, and strategic resilience.

CHALLENGES:

Employment & Livelihood Crisis

- **Educated unemployment:** Rising unemployment among graduates due to mismatch between education and market needs.
- **Precarious jobs:** Growth of gig and informal employment with no social security.
- **Regional imbalance:** Job creation concentrated in urban pockets.
 - PLFS data shows **youth unemployment consistently higher** than overall unemployment. CMIE reports sharp job losses among educated youth post-COVID.

Skill Mismatch & Quality of Education

- Overemphasis on rote learning. Limited vocational and industry-linked training.
- Digital divide in rural and poor households.
- Only a small proportion of India's workforce has formal skill training (less than 5% historically).

Mental Health Crisis Among Youth

- Rising stress, anxiety, depression, exam pressure, and career uncertainty.
- Social stigma and shortage of counsellors.
- Poor campus and community-level mental health support.
- Over **60,700 suicides** in the **15–29 age group (2020–22)**, highest globally. WHO identifies Indian youth as highly vulnerable to mental health disorders.
 - Increasing student suicides in competitive exam hubs like Kota.

Gender Dimensions: Unequal Youth Empowerment

- **Female Labour Force Participation Rate:** Below **25%**, among the lowest globally.

- **Child marriage:** Despite a 50% decline since 2006, **23.3% of girls still marry before 18** (NFHS-5).
- **Teenage pregnancies:** Around **7% nationally**, with sharp regional disparities
- **National Family Health Survey** highlights persistent gaps in reproductive autonomy and gender equality.

Health and Well-Being: A Silent Crisis

- **Reproductive health:** **36%** of youth experience unintended pregnancies, **30%** report unmet fertility goals

Social Inequality & Marginalisation

- Youth from SC/ST, minorities, migrants, and urban poor face unequal access to education and jobs.
- Digital exclusion worsens inequality.
- NSS and NFHS data show persistent gaps in education, nutrition, and employment outcomes.
- Migrant youth workers faced mass job losses and distress during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Substance Abuse & Risk Behaviour

- Rising drug and alcohol use among youth. Peer pressure, stress, and unemployment as triggers.
- Lack of rehabilitation infrastructure.
 - Growing opioid addiction among youth in Punjab and northeastern states, proximity to golden triangle and golden crescent forms a major threat.

Weak Civic & Political Engagement

- Political apathy among sections of youth, causing lack of awareness over their political and civic rights and duties.
- Limited platforms for constructive participation. Online misinformation influencing youth opinions.

Urbanisation Pressures & Migration

- Unsafe housing, informal settlements, and job insecurity for migrant youth. Exploitation in informal urban labour markets.
- Young migrant workers in metros lacking social protection and access to public services.

WAY FORWARD:

Align Education with Employability (From School to Workplace)

- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** Emphasises critical thinking, multidisciplinary learning, and vocational exposure from school level.
- **PM National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS):** Promotes industry-linked apprenticeships for real-world skills.
- **Yashpal Committee (2009):** Warned against rote learning and over-specialisation; advocated holistic education.
- **Economic Survey (multiple editions):** Recommends stronger academia–industry linkages.
- **Germany's Dual Vocational Training System:** Combines classroom learning with paid apprenticeships, adaptable to Indian MSMEs.

- **Government Initiatives:** Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, PM-DAKSH (for marginalised youth), Startup India ecosystem support.
- **South Korea:** Youth startup incubation tied to university ecosystems.
- **Israel:** State-supported innovation hubs with military, civil tech spillovers.

Improve Youth Health: Mental, Reproductive & Nutritional

- **Government Initiatives:** National Adolescent Health Programme (RKSK), National Mental Health Programme, Poshan Abhiyaan
- **WHO & UNICEF:** Call for youth-friendly mental health and SRHR services.
- **Nordic countries:** School-based mental health counselling as a norm.
- **Thailand:** Youth-friendly reproductive health clinics with confidentiality.

Empower Young Women & Close Gender Gaps

- **Government Initiatives:** Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mission Shakti, National Creche Scheme, Draft National Youth Policy 2024 (focus on safety and reproductive health)
- **Justice Verma Committee:** Emphasised safety, dignity, and institutional accountability.
- **NITI Aayog Gender Reports:** Stress childcare, transport safety, and flexible work.
- **Bangladesh:** Female workforce participation through garment sector skilling.
- **Nordic countries:** Universal childcare enabling women's employment.

Strengthen Civic Engagement & Leadership

- **Government Initiatives:** National Service Scheme (NSS), NCC, YUVA- PM's Scheme for Mentoring Young Authors
- **Second ARC:** Recommended citizen participation for responsive governance.
- **Japan & South Korea:** Structured youth volunteering linked to employability and leadership.

Digital & Technological Empowerment

- **Government Initiatives:** Digital India, Skill India Digital, National Career Service (NCS) Portal
- **Estonia:** Universal digital literacy and e-governance participation.
- **Singapore:** Lifelong digital upskilling vouchers.

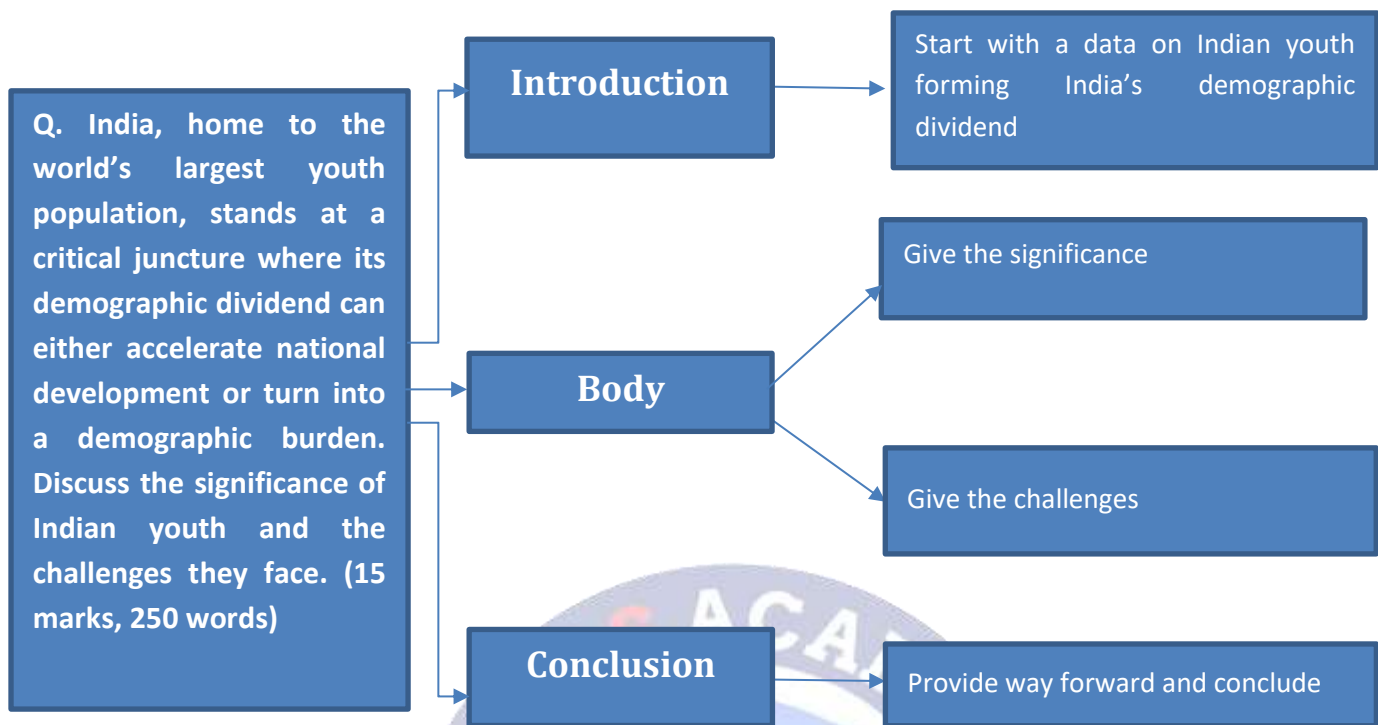
Decentralised & Youth-Centric Governance

- **Draft National Youth Policy 2024:** Calls for district-level youth planning aligned with SDGs.
- **Punchhi Commission:** Strengthen local governance and decentralised planning.
- **Brazil:** Municipal youth councils in policy design.
- **Rwanda:** Youth quotas in advisory bodies.

PRACTICE QUESTION:

Q. India, home to the world's largest youth population, stands at a critical juncture where its demographic dividend can either accelerate national development or turn into a demographic burden. Discuss the significance of Indian youth and the challenges they face. (15 marks, 250 words)

APPROACH:



MODEL ANSWER:

India's youth constitute the backbone of its socio-economic and strategic future. With nearly **371 million youth (15–29 years)**, India has the largest youth population globally, accounting for **27.2% of the population in 2021**, though this share is projected to decline by 2036, making the current period decisive for harnessing the demographic dividend.

Significance of Indian Youth

- **Demographic Dividend & Economic Growth:** India has the world's largest youth population—**~371 million (15–29 years)**. A lower dependency ratio boosts savings, consumption, and investment. According to **World Bank & NITI Aayog**, effective utilisation of youth can add **USD 1 trillion to GDP by 2030**.
- **Global Workforce & Strategic Advantage:** India's young labour force offsets ageing populations in **Japan and Europe**, strengthening India's role in global manufacturing, IT services, and healthcare. Germany's skill mobility initiatives increasingly recruit Indian youth.
- **Innovation, Startups & Digital Economy:** Youth dominate India's startup ecosystem, driving fintech, ed-tech, health-tech and digital public infrastructure like **UPI**. Youth-led startups accelerated digital inclusion post-COVID.
- **Human Capital & Productivity Enhancement:** Youth are key beneficiaries and drivers of **NEP 2020**, skilling missions, and apprenticeships under **PM-NAPS**, enhancing productivity in manufacturing and services.
- **Social Reform & Civic Engagement:** Youth act as agents of social change, challenging patriarchy, caste discrimination and social injustice. **Pinjra Tod movement**, youth leadership in **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, NSS and NCC.

- **Cultural Soft Power & Global Image:** Indian youth shape global perceptions through cinema, sports, music, digital content and yoga, strengthening India's soft power diplomacy. Global reach of Indian films, IPL, digital influencers.
- **Strategic, Defence & Geopolitical Role:** Youth power India's defence forces, cyber capabilities, space sector and innovation-led diplomacy, ensuring long-term strategic resilience.

Challenges Faced by Indian Youth

- **Educated Unemployment & Jobless Growth:** Youth unemployment remains higher than the national average due to skill mismatch and slow job creation. PLFS and CMIE show persistent graduate unemployment.
- **Skill Mismatch & Poor Quality of Education:** Overemphasis on rote learning and limited industry exposure. Less than **5% of India's workforce** has formal vocational training historically.
- **Mental Health Crisis:** Rising stress, anxiety, exam pressure and career uncertainty, coupled with stigma and poor access to counselling. Over **60,700 suicides (15–29 age group, 2020–22)**, highest globally.
- **Gender Inequality & Low Female Participation:** Female Labour Force Participation Rate is **below 25%**, among the lowest globally. **23.3% of women** aged 20–24 married before 18 (NFHS-5).
- **Sexual & Reproductive Health Gaps:** Limited autonomy and access to SRHR services. **36% unintended pregnancies, 30% unmet fertility goals**, teenage pregnancy ~7%.
- **Social Inequality & Marginalisation:** SC/ST, minority, migrant and urban-poor youth face unequal access to education, jobs and digital resources. Migrant youth distress during COVID-19 lockdowns.
- **Substance Abuse, Misinformation & Risk Behaviour:** Rising drug and alcohol abuse, peer pressure, unemployment stress, and online misinformation. Opioid addiction among youth in Punjab and Northeast due to proximity to Golden Crescent/Triangle.

Way Forward

A multi-pronged strategy is needed:

- **Align education with employability** through **NEP 2020** and apprenticeship expansion (PM-NAPS), echoing the **Yashpal Committee's** call against rote learning.
- **Job-centric skilling and entrepreneurship** via PMKVY, Startup India, and MUDRA, inspired by Germany's dual training model.
- **Strengthen youth health**, especially mental and reproductive health, through RKSK and community counselling.
- **Empower young women** with childcare, safety, and flexible work, as emphasised by the **Justice Verma Committee**.
- **Decentralised youth governance** under the Draft National Youth Policy 2024, with district-level youth councils.

As envisioned by **Swami Vivekananda**, India's future depends on the character, confidence, and commitment of its youth. Treating youth not merely as beneficiaries but as partners in nation-building is essential to convert India's demographic strength into sustainable national progress.