**Population boom**

**[Bilal Mustikhan](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/bilal-mustikhan)**

March 29, 2021

Pakistan has failed to provide basic necessities—such as education, shelter, and healthcare—to its growing population of more than 220 million people. Anyone trying to assess the country’s dismal economic growth can connect the dots by looking backwards.

The faultlines and cracks within our system have been brought to the fore owing to the pandemic. The education system has been crippled; some 20 million five- to sixteen-year-olds are still out of school, even though Article 25-A of the constitution mandates the state to educate children. The dilapidated healthcare system fails to look after people during normal times, and the pandemic has pushed the system to the brink of collapse at multiple instances. Majority of the informal sector which makes a large portion of the country’s GDP are shelterless. They occupy streets and different spaces in order to survive the hustle bustle of the metropolitan cities. The only way to collectively address all these prevalent issues is to begin by addressing population growth.

[90% of US adults to be eligible for jab by April: Biden](https://nation.com.pk/30-Mar-2021/90-percent-of-us-adults-to-be-eligible-for-jab-by-april-biden)

Population is a major factor which determines the trajectory of a country. Population size can either influence or hinder growth. In our case, further increase will only exacerbate the education, healthcare, and shelter related issues. There is a plethora of factors behind Pakistan’s rapid increase in population. Firstly, abject poverty, as well as religion and culture, compel individuals to have larger families as the additional members become part of the labour force and allow them to generate more income.

Secondly, the custom of early marriages and the preference of a male offspring leads parents continually giving birth as long as the woman can bear a child. It is no longer surprising that Pakistan has the highest birth and fertility rate amongst the South Asian countries–including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Maldives.

Thirdly, advanced technology has allowed the world to control the spread of diseases which can prove to be fatal. While many people have lost their lives throughout the globe due to the coronavirus pandemic, the rapid creation of a vaccine to defang the virus portrays the world’s growing ability to tackle life threatening diseases. While the cure for many diseases has been discovered, the poor healthcare system prevents Pakistan from fully addressing the woes of the ones in dire need of proper medical care. Diseases such as Tuberculosis, Malaria, Dengue fever, Cancer, and Hepatitis have become very common and are the leading cause of death. They, however, fail to obstruct population growth.

[Israel's currency value falls to lowest rate against USD in over 4 months](https://nation.com.pk/30-Mar-2021/israel-s-currency-value-falls-to-lowest-rate-against-usd-in-over-4-months)

Lastly, the absence of family planning has been a major factor behind Pakistan’s rapidly increasing population. President Ayub Khan tried to implement family planning policies but failed to progress because it was and still is considered a taboo. Lack of access to family planning services, fear of side effects, and poor quality of services also prevent women from using contraceptives.

While Pakistan has managed to produce more food than its population size, it unfortunately never trickles down to the ones who needs it the most. Pakistan may not be able to keep this up for long. Currently, approximately 20 percent of the population is malnourished and 45 percent of children under five are stunted according to the UNWFP. Besides food scarcity, Pakistan is also at the brink of a water crisis. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it will face acute water scarcity by 2025.

Furthermore, rapid population growth also compels people to migrate from rural to urban areas in search for better living standards or job opportunities. This, in turn, generates more pollution than average. Urban areas function as focal points for industries which generate pollution on a large scale. Human activity will have an adverse effect on the climate, leading to dramatic climate change in the near future.

[US to weigh sanctions after Iran, China ink $400b deal](https://nation.com.pk/30-Mar-2021/us-to-weigh-sanctions-after-iran-china-ink-dollar-400b-deal)

Population growth is a ticking time bomb which, if not addressed immediately, will pose a threat to the existence of the country.

The dilapidated infrastructure already can’t meet the demands of citizens, further addition will only put more burden on the existing infrastructure to a point where it will paralyse. The lucky few who are currently employed are struggling to make ends meet, whereas the unemployed are being pushed from pillar to post in search of the non-existent job opportunities. This employment crisis will only magnify in light of a population boom as several will be pushed below the poverty line. The absence of adequate facilities to provide education, healthcare, and shelter, coupled with the growing poverty and disasters posed by climate change, will lead to a social disorder. In a country where only a certain class has access to justice and only their interests are protected by the state, a situation of lawlessness will be unleashed.