

# Management of Population and Migration in Nepal

## Introduction

The constitution of Nepal has provisioned the shared responsibilities of population management to three tiers of government. Population management should make maximum utilization of demographic dividend which is linked with population distribution (1). A recent preliminary report of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) reveals that Nepal’s population grew by 0.93 percent annually on average, the lowest in the last 80 years, while the average population growth rate of the previous census was 1.35 percent (2). Nepal witnessed a decrease in overall population in two consecutive censuses in 1920 and 1930, and its population has been growing remarkably (3). In the last six decades, the country saw over two percent population growth in the first four decades. The population growth had started to decrease significantly since the 2011 Population census, according to the bureau’s records.

Though international out-migration has also been touted as the reason behind the low population growth over the last decade and as per CBS, a total of 2.2 million Nepali living abroad currently (4). Ten years ago, a total of 1.9 million people were living abroad most of the time. The census also showed that Nepal’s international out-migrated population is not as large as it has been believed to be, though its effect has been well reflected in the national demographic structure.

## Methods

This policy brief has been prepared through a systematic review of literature, expert consultation, analysis of recommendations from the intergovernmental organization and evidence gathered from policy discussion at the national and sub-national levels.

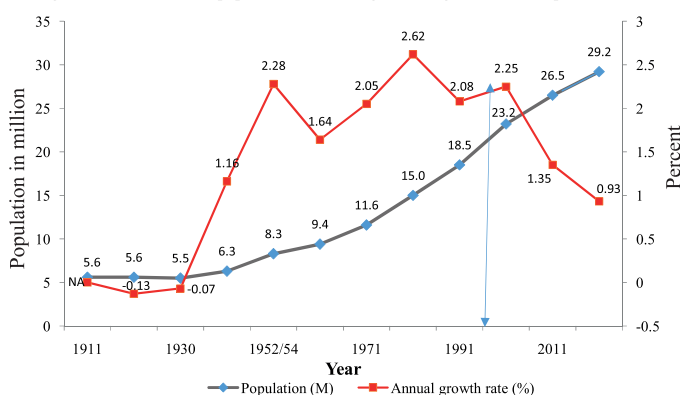
## Policy Issues and Options

Figure 1 shows the growth of the total population and average annual growth rate, in Nepal (1911–2021). In the last six decades of efforts on population and development have resulted in Nepal’s population first growing at a very high rate per year and in the last two decades decelerating. The declining growth rate (1.35%) started during the 2001-2011 period and in the following 2011-2021 period which is even lower (0.93%).

However, out migration increased substantially causing an increasing trend of districts having negative population growth rates between 2011 and 2021 (Increased from 27 to 32 districts) and all these depopulated districts belong to the mountain and hill districts (2). The population growth rate is very uneven between Mountains/Hills combined (0.25%) and the Terai (1.56%) which the means population in the Terai will double in the next 45 years while it will take 277 years for the Mountains/Hills.

Among the 7 provinces, population growth

Figure 1 Growth of total population and average annual growth rate, Nepal: 1911–2021



Source: DOS. 1958, CBS. 1968, CBS. 1975, CBS. 1984, CBS. 1993, CBS & UNFPA 2002, CBS. 2012 and CBS. 2022. Preliminary Population Census Results. Population and Housing Census 2021.

during the 2011-21 period was the highest in Lumbini (1.25%) followed by Madhesh (1.20%). In the rest of the 5 provinces the growth rate was below the national rate and Gandaki province had the lowest growth rate of 0.3% per annum. Among the 7 provinces, the population size is highest in Madhesh followed by Bagmati, Lumbini, Province 1, Sudurpaschim and Gandaki. Karnali has the lowest population size (Figure 2).

The demographic dividend has begun in Nepal since 1995 with the growth of the working-age population becoming higher than the growth of the total population (Figure 3). Nepal is currently in the window of opportunity to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend to accelerate economic growth but it is estimated to end by 2047.

## Evidence analysis on major issues

### *Existing policies are inadequate to address the changing dynamics of the population*

The census report clearly indicates that Nepal needs to revise its existing population policies. Especially, migration is the population management issue in Nepal because of its controversial role in the contribution to the national economy. Most of the previous national policies were influenced by global population growth trends rather than the national population trends. In Nepal, an anti-natalist population policy has been used to regulate fertility from its first five-year development plan. The population policy of Nepal is mainly shifted into three phases: the use of family planning to control the birth rate was adopted first then shifted into mortality regulating policy focusing on women and newborn health and the current population policy seems to be shifting into migration regulating policy since last decade.

### Options

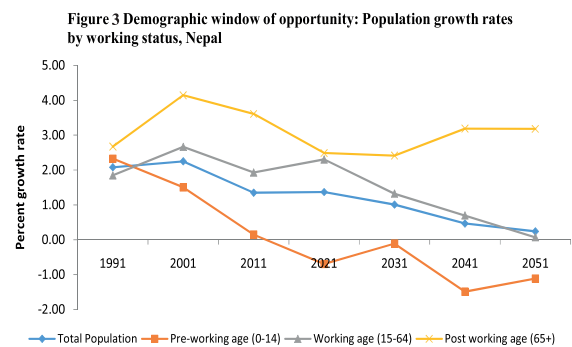
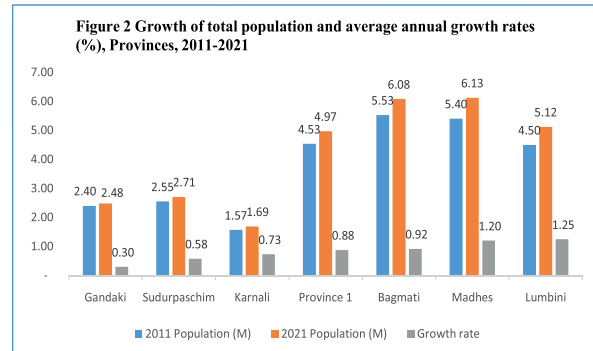
- Shift in population policy from population control by decreasing fertility to population management policy underscoring the contemporary low population growth pattern.
- Strengthen the mechanism to update population profile, and migration pattern through integration of the population electronic database at local levels and provincial levels with the national network (IPIMS).
- Extend and incentivize the registration of vital events such as birth, marriage, migration, and death (including the cause of death).

### **Unmanaged migration of youth/working population and students**

Nepali international migration patterns over past two decades have been dominated by the migration of the labor force for subsistence. The remittance obtained from the labor force working abroad has made a significant contribution to the country's economy. Having said that, accounts of Nepali migrants facing hardship in their host country are poignant. More recently, student migration to developed countries is on an increasing trend and the repercussion of student migration remains unknown. This dominant trend, and the potential impacts of such large-scale foreign employment and attraction of foreign study need to be properly measured and understood by Nepal, to ensure that potential positive impacts are harnessed and that negative impacts are minimized.

### Options

- Implement aspect of migrant labor management guidelines and laws needs to be strongly monitored.



- Strengthen the mechanism of pre-departure health checkups and social protection/ health insurance for migrant workers in the host country through the diplomatic network
- Establish a provision for skill enhancement of the labor force based on the skill demands in the host countries.
- Collaborate and coordinate with multisector to check the out-migration of students seeking higher education in foreign countries

### ***Unplanned urbanization and under-addressed urban health problems***

Internal migration pattern in Nepal reflects the exodus of people from rural settings to urban cities which has resulted in an unplanned settlement in the major cities of Nepal. The 2021 census shows highly distorted population distribution by ecological region with 77 percent of the mountain landmass inhabited by only 46 percent of the total population. This trend has the over-strained infrastructure in the urban areas including health service delivery. Furthermore, informal settlers migrating to urban areas are unregistered in the civil registration database at the local level and are deprived of essential health services such as routine vaccination, resulting in the increased risk of both communicable and non-communicable diseases among these populations. Likewise, poor air quality, shortage of running water, and improper disposal of solid waste are some of the emerging urban health issues due to unplanned urbanization.

#### ***Options***

- Coordinate with concerned stakeholders to facilitate planned urbanization and improve urban infrastructure.
- Support the improvement in water supply and WASH coverage in urban areas by inviting investment from private sectors.
- Facilitate the provision of affordable and safe housing with enough open space to meet the demand of the growing urban population.
- Promote the interventions of urban health initiatives including air pollution control, road safety and solid waste disposal.
- Promote a village level campaigns to discourage rapid urbanization from rural areas of Nepal by transforming rural settlements into the smart village.

### ***Underutilized demographic dividend***

Demographic dividend refers to economic growth resulting from a change in the structure of the population of a country, particularly an increase in the working population's productivity that results in a boost in per capita income. The changing age structure of the Nepali population provides opportunities amidst some challenges. Currently, there is a relatively more working-age population in Nepal compared to the dependent population which has created a demographic dividend. Unfortunately, this demographic dividend has remained underutilized, which if well managed can support the acceleration of economic growth.

#### ***Options***

- Invest in quality education and the health of the population (physical, mental, and spiritual well-being).
- Incentivize private sectors to create employment opportunities within the country for the working population
- Use the expertise of human resources returning from abroad for economic growth of Nepal.
- Promote income-generating activities at local levels.
- Collaborate in life skills and employment-based education at the school level.
- Promote vocational training to youths residing in rural settings.
- Promote good governance and leadership

## Conclusion

Nepal needs to formulate a long-term goal of population management with a clear vision of the nation's development. The goal must have the objectives to address all the consequences of population management in Nepal with respect to the national and international population trends, policies, and predictions. The key interventions to manage population and migration in Nepal should focus on capitalizing on the demographic dividend, urban planning, and managing migration.

## Recommendations

- Revisit existing population policies from population control to targeted interventions.
- Strengthen the civil registration and vital statistics systems and integrate the information on population dynamics into a national electronic data repository (IPIMS).
- Provide social protection services and health insurance to migrant workers through diplomatic channels. Ensure pre-departure orientation to migrants on health, safety, security, etiquette based on host countries.
- Develop and implement mechanisms to use the internal and returnee migrants
- Conduct a national survey and establish a provision to extend civil registration of informal urban settlers to increase coverage of essential health services among the urban poor.
- Promote to manage settlements based on vulnerability mapping.
- Transform rural settlements into the smart village to retain the local population and prevent rapid urbanization.
- Establish and accelerate life skills and employment-based education at the school level.
- Promote the concept of utilizing the skill sets of youth for local development.
- Coordinate with the private sector to increase create employment opportunities for working population at the local level.

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**Recommended citation:** NHRC. 2022. *Management of population and migration in Nepal(Policy brief)*. Kathmandu. Nepal Health Research Council.

Published by



Government of Nepal  
**Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC)**

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