

India Without a Census

Posted at: 12/06/2025

India Without a Census: Planning in the Dark

Context

The **Census of India**, conducted every **10 years since 1881**, is a vital exercise for governance and planning. However, the **2021 Census** was delayed due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**, marking the **first disruption** in over a century. The government now plans to conduct the Census in **two phases in 2026 and 2027**, with **March 1, 2027**, as the reference date.

Reasons for Delay

- The delay was attributed to the **Covid-19 impact on education**.
 - About **30 lakh enumerators**, mostly **primary school teachers**, could not be spared without disrupting schools.
 - The **six-year delay** is longer than in **Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka**.
-

Importance of Census in Governance

- **Core data source** for all socio-economic surveys in India.
- Provides information on **population, education, migration, occupation, language, disability**, etc.
- Enables **accurate sampling**, planning, and **targeted welfare delivery**.
- Acts as a **mirror of change**, capturing long-term trends every decade.

- After a **16-year gap**, the upcoming Census will be crucial to understanding current realities.
-

Role in Monetary Policy and Inflation Management

- **Census forms the base for CPI weights**, influencing **RBI's Monetary Policy Committee** decisions.
 - **Food items account for 46% of CPI**, based on Census-backed consumption patterns.
 - Outdated data may lead to **inflation miscalculation**, causing **high interest rates** and **slower economic growth**.
-

Understanding Internal Migration

- Migration is often neglected in population estimates.
 - Based on **2011 Census**:
 - **62%** intra-district migration
 - **26%** inter-district
 - **12%** inter-state
 - **Rural-to-rural migration: 48%** (largest share)
 - **Urban-to-urban migration**: Fastest growing
 - Updated data is essential for **budget allocation, welfare schemes**, and addressing **language-based tensions**.
-

Urbanisation and Policy Gaps

- Urbanisation rate in India varies between **30% and 70%**, depending on definitions.

- Urban areas contribute **60% of GDP**, occupy only **3% of land**.
 - Lack of clarity hampers **urban planning, infrastructure development**, and **service delivery**.
-

Why Census is Irreplaceable

- Surveys (NSS, NFHS, etc.) depend on **Census as the sampling base**.
- Administrative data is often **incomplete, inconsistent**, and **not standardised**.
- Example: **NFHS 2020-21** showed **30% households without toilets**, contradicting claims of total sanitation.
- Only the Census offers **objective, comprehensive, and comparable data** across India.

