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International GCSE

Pakistan Studies

Paper 2

The Human and Physical Geography of Pakistan

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OXFORD

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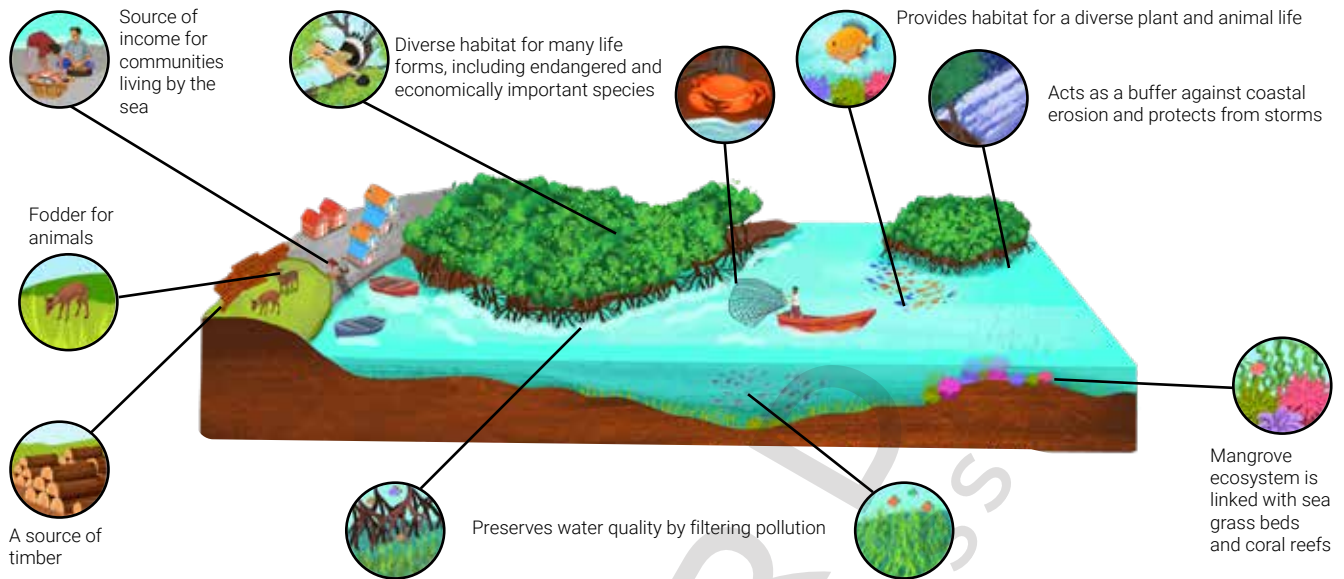
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▲ **Figure 1.5: The Importance of mangroves for people and wildlife**

Mangroves provide critical habitat for diverse marine and bird species, including commercially important fish and crustaceans. They act as natural barriers, protecting coastal areas from erosion, storm surges, and the impacts of climate change.

Pakistan's mangrove forests exist within a distinct ecological framework. These trees play crucial roles in carbon sequestration, soil stabilisation, and marine biodiversity. Furthermore, these forests serve as nurseries for many fish species, supporting local fisheries and livelihoods.

However, mangrove forests face threats from:

- Reduced freshwater flow in the Indus River due to upstream dams and irrigation
- Coastal development and urbanisation
- Sea-level rise and climate change
- Water pollution from industrial and urban runoff

d. Alpine and Subalpine Meadows

Found above the tree line in high altitude mountainous regions, these meadows are characterised by short growing seasons and resilient vegetation. They are distributed across the highest elevations of the Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush ranges in Gilgit-Baltistan, northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Azad Kashmir.

These ecosystems are important for:

- Supporting unique high-altitude flora and fauna
- Providing summer grazing grounds for livestock
- Regulating water flow in mountain watersheds
- Attracting tourism and supporting local economies

Synoptic link

You will learn more about the forests of Pakistan in Chapter 3.



▲ **Figure 1.6: Alpine forests in Pakistan are located at altitudes above 4500 metres**

Did you know?

The tree line, or timberline, marks the boundary beyond which environmental conditions are too harsh for trees to grow.



▲ **Figure 1.7:** Riverine forests are found along riverbanks and floodplains

e. Riverine Forests

These forests are found along the banks of the Indus River and its tributaries, particularly in Punjab and Sindh. These trees are adapted to periodic flooding and play crucial roles in:

- Stabilising riverbanks and reducing soil erosion
- Providing habitat for diverse wildlife, including migratory birds
- Filtering pollutants and improving water quality
- Supporting local livelihoods through non-timber forest products

1.2 | Characteristics of Landforms

Pakistan's topography exhibits remarkable diversity, ranging from towering mountain ranges to vast deserts, fertile plains, and coastal regions. This geographical variation plays a significant role in the country's climate and ecosystems but also profoundly impacting its culture, economy, and development patterns.

Let's explore the main features of Pakistan's landscape in detail.

1. The Western Highlands

The Western Highlands form a complex system of ranges that lies along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. This region is characterised by rugged terrain, dry climates, and strategic importance. It extends from the Makran Coast in the south to the Pamir Plateau in the north, covering most of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit–Baltistan, and parts of Punjab. It includes several important mountain ranges, such as:

a. Sulaiman-Kirthar Mountains

The Sulaiman-Kirthar Mountains are 850 km-long range that separates the Balochistan Plateau from the Indus Plains. They are composed of rugged limestone, sandstone, and shale, creating a captivating tapestry of contrasting features.

Reaching an average height of 3440 metres, the Sulaiman mountains stretch southward from South Waziristan and merge with the Marri-Bugti hills. Takht-i-Sulaiman, its highest peak, stands tall at 3487 metres. The Kirthar Range stretches for 400 km towards the south, culminating at the Arabian Sea, where it merges with the coastal region of Sindh. The Bolan Pass, a crucial historical passage connecting the Balochistan Plateau with the Sindh Plains, lies between the Kirthar Range and the Quetta Syntaxis-Zarghun Knot.

It has an arid climate with limited rainfall, making it challenging for agriculture to thrive. However, some communities depend on seasonal streams and make their living from stone quarries. It remains largely uninhabited, except for scattered communities that have adapted to resource scarcity and the harsh environment.



▲ **Figure 1.8:** The Bolan Pass

Building skills

K

Research and identify other mountain ranges globally that share similar characteristics or formation processes with the Sulaiman-Kirthar Mountains.

The Indus Plains can be divided into the following geographic regions:

a. Piedmont Plains

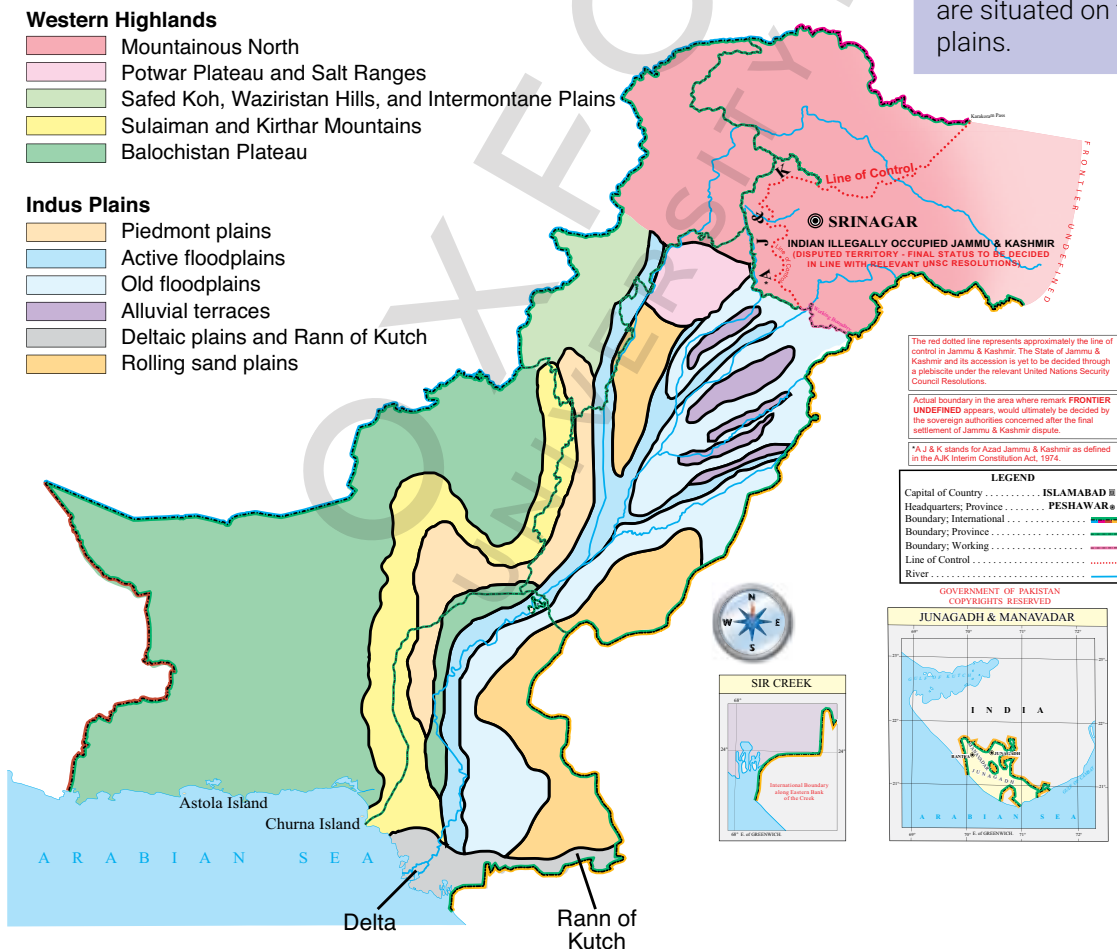
- These are gently sloping alluvial plains that form at the foot of mountain ranges.
- In Pakistan, they are found along the base of the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, and Sulaiman ranges.
- They act as a transition zone between the mountains and the flatter Indus plains.
- They consist of coarse sediments (gravel, sand, boulders) deposited by fast-flowing mountain streams as they emerge onto the plains.
- These areas often have a high water table due to the percolation of mountain runoff, making them suitable for agriculture with proper irrigation.
- These play a crucial role in Pakistan's agriculture and urban development, serving as a buffer zone between the rugged mountains and the densely populated Indus plains.



▲ **Figure 1.12:** Piedmont plains are formed by the erosion of mountains from rivers and streams that create a plain.

Did you know?

Cities like Peshawar and Quetta are situated on the piedmont plains.



▲ **Figure 1.13:** Landforms and drainage of Pakistan

Did you know?

In June 2015, a heat wave hit the Sindh province, killing more than 700 people. Most of the deaths were due to heatstroke and severe dehydration.



▲ **Figure 2.13: Extreme weather events has forced human displacement and created long-term challenges for rehabilitation**

Did you know?

According to the World Bank Group, between 1992 and 2021, climate and weather-related disasters in Pakistan resulted in a total of \$29.3 billion in economic losses. These losses, from damage to property, crops, and livestock, were equivalent to 11.1% of Pakistan's 2020 GDP.

2. Water Resources and Access

Climate change affects water resources, including rivers, lakes, and groundwater. Changes in precipitation, glacial melt, and increased evaporation lead to water stress and competition among different sectors of society. In Pakistan, where water scarcity is a pressing issue, climate change exacerbates challenges related to water management and access to clean drinking water, impacting rural and urban populations. The water quality data of Pakistan compared to the National Standards for Drinking Water Quality indicate that out of 435 sources, 61% were unsafe for drinking, while only 39% were safe.

3. Health and Well-being

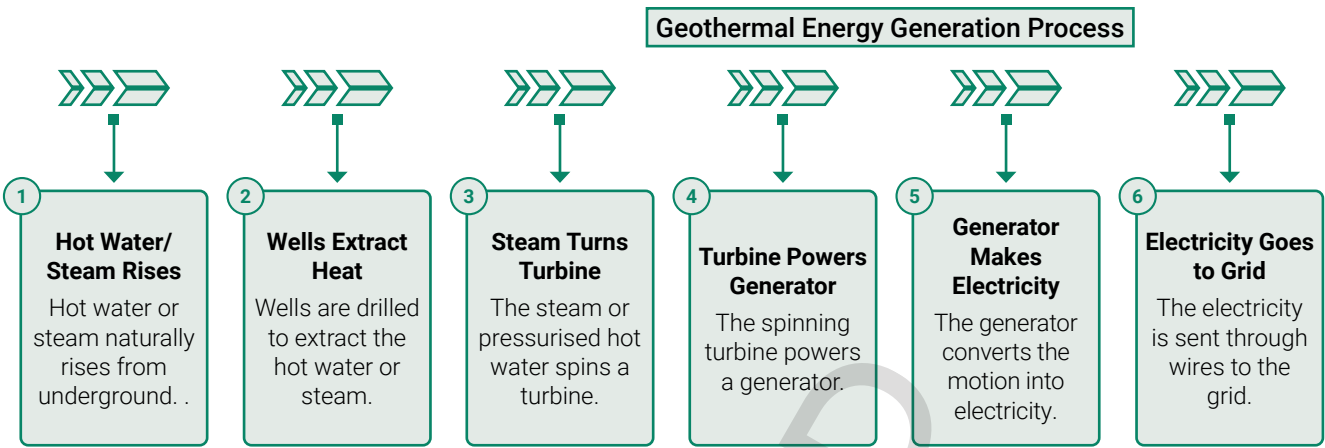
Climate change can also affect human health through heat-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues. Rising temperatures and extreme weather events increase the risk of heat stress, dehydration, and heatstroke. Changes in precipitation patterns and temperature also impact the transmission and distribution of infectious diseases. In Pakistan, climate change poses significant risks to public health infrastructure, healthcare services, and disease prevention efforts.

4. Infrastructure and Settlements

Climate change has increased natural hazards, such as floods, storms, and landslides, which cause damage to infrastructure like roads, bridges, buildings, and utilities. People living in low-lying coastal areas, floodplains, and mountainous regions are more vulnerable to displacement, property damage, and loss of livelihoods due to climate-related disasters. In Pakistan, where rapid urbanisation and inadequate infrastructure are significant challenges, climate change strains resources and resilience, affecting housing, transportation, and services in vulnerable areas.

5. Economic Development and Livelihoods

Climate change can cause livelihood disruptions and worsen poverty and inequality. Losses in agriculture, tourism, fisheries, and other sectors can harm economic growth and stability, particularly in rural and coastal regions. Small-scale farmers, fisherfolk, and marginalised communities, heavily reliant on natural resources, are disproportionately affected by climate change due to a lack of access to adaptive measures and financial resources. In Pakistan, where many people depend on agriculture and natural resource-based livelihoods, climate change poses a significant threat to sustainable development goals and poverty reduction efforts.



Recall and review

6. Compare the environmental impacts of different renewable energy resources, such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power.

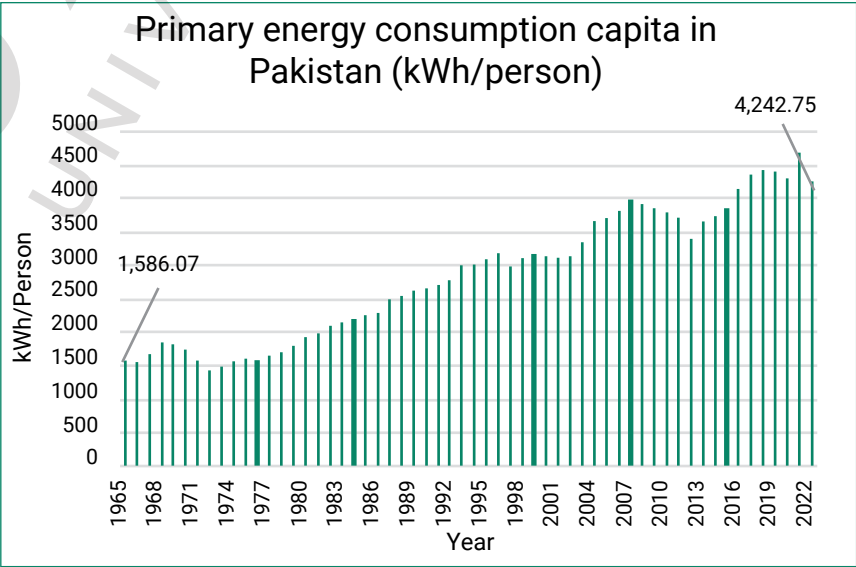
Advantages	Disadvantages
Reliable and consistent energy source.	High initial costs for drilling and plant construction.
Low greenhouse gas emissions.	Limited to regions with accessible geothermal resources.
Small land footprint compared to other renewable sources.	Potential for induced seismic activity.

4.2 | Energy Consumption and Production

To gain an accurate picture of a country’s energy efficiency, it is important to first examine at how and where energy is being used. Total final consumption (TFC) refers to the energy consumed by end users, such as individuals and businesses for heating and cooling, to run lights, devices, and appliances, and to power vehicles, machines and factories. Energy consumption in Pakistan has been on an upward trajectory, driven by rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and improved living standards.

Stretch yourself

- Analyse how renewable energy can support rural economic development and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Pakistan.
- Propose and justify strategies for Pakistan to achieve a more sustainable energy mix by balancing renewable and non-renewable energy sources.



► **Figure 4.10:** Data source: Energy Institute - Statistical Review of World Energy (2023)

Objectives

Students will learn about:

- Population structure of Pakistan and the factors that have affected how it has changed over time.
- Population growth and factors affecting the changes, including birth rates; death rates; infant mortality rates; life expectancy and natural increase.
- Physical and human factors affecting population density and distribution in Pakistan.
- Factors affecting internal and international migration, and the impact on Pakistan's culture, economy, and society.

Did you know?

Based on CIA and Helgi Library data, the natural population increase rate in Pakistan in 2024 is estimated to be around 18.76 per 1,000.

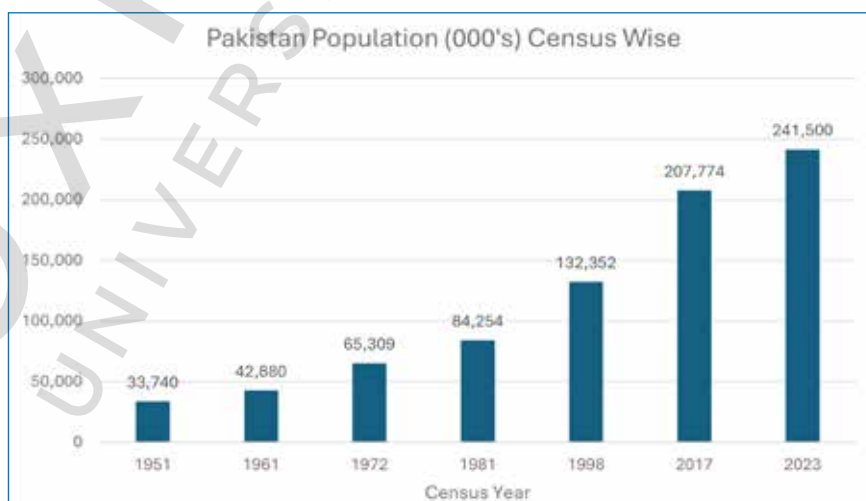
Getting Started

What role does demography play in addressing current global challenges and shaping healthcare and education policies, urban planning, and environmental management?

5.1 | Changes in Population Structure

Understanding population size and growth is crucial for policymakers planning food, clothing, housing, and employment needs. By mid-2024, the world's population reached about 8.162 billion, while the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023 Digital Census recorded 241.49 million residents.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023 Digital Census, Pakistan's population climbed from 33.74 million in 1951 to 241.49 million in 2023, registering an annual growth rate of 2.55%. It also shows that 61.18% of Pakistanis live in rural areas, while 38.82% reside in urban centres—illustrating a steady, long-term trend toward urbanisation.



Refer to figure 5.1, showing Pakistan's population pyramid in 2023. With 34.81% of the population under 15 years old, the broad base reflects a historically high birth rate and the potential for a **demographic dividend** as these youth enter the workforce. However, this youthfulness contributes to a **high dependency ratio** of about 70 dependents per 100 working-age adults, straining the labour force.

2. Climate

Climate variations across Pakistan play a crucial role in population distribution. The arid Thar Desert in the southeast remains sparsely populated due to extreme temperatures and water scarcity. Places with temperate climates, like Punjab and Sindh, consider support denser populations by enabling agriculture and providing comfortable living conditions.

3. Water Availability

Access to continuous water supply is a critical factor in population distribution. Regions near major rivers like the Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum are densely populated, supporting extensive agriculture and urban development. The historic city of Mohenjo-daro, for instance, flourished along the Indus. In contrast, water-scarce regions like parts of Balochistan have lower population densities.

4. Natural Resources

The presence of natural resources influences settlement patterns. Despite its harsh climate, Balochistan attracts settlements near its mineral-rich areas, such as the Reko Diq copper-gold mine. Similarly, the discovery of natural gas in Sui led to an increased population in that area.

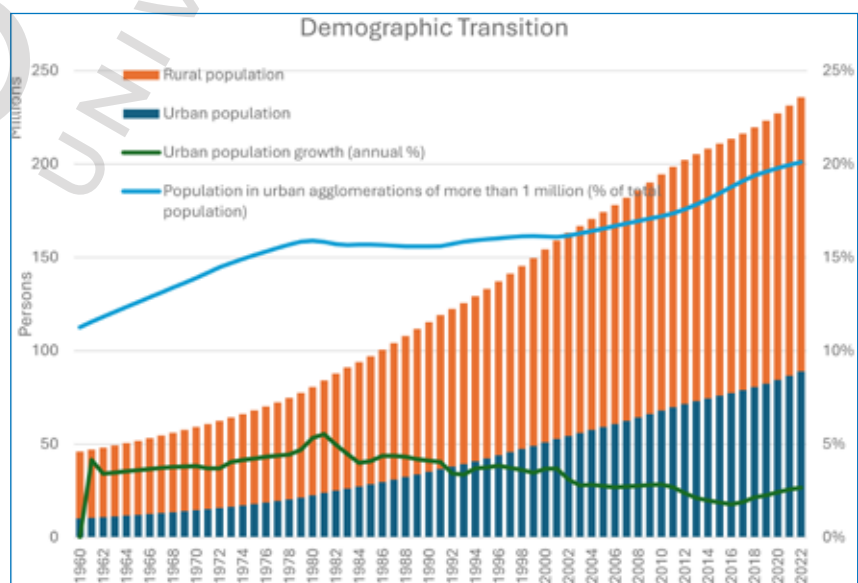
Did you know?

Economic conditions and population distribution affect the government's capacity to deliver quality education and healthcare in the country.

Human Factors Affecting Population Density

1. Urbanisation

Rapid urbanisation has led to high population densities in Pakistan's cities. These cities function as key economic magnets, drawing people from across the country due to a broader spectrum of employment opportunities. These opportunities are prominently found in sectors such as manufacturing, export-oriented industries, and the small-scale enterprise sector.



► Figure 5.5: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023

- **Investing in trade infrastructure**, such as ports, roads, and digital networks, is essential for minimising trade costs. Notably, ongoing projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) exemplify steps in this direction.
- **Implement rigorous quality control measures** to comply with international standards and obtain international product certifications to enhance product quality.
- **Pursuing improved terms in existing trade agreements** and exploring new ones will be advantageous.
- **Utilising economic diplomacy**, such as trade missions, international exhibitions, and diplomatic channels, to address trade disputes, obtain preferential access, and promote Pakistani products on the global stage.
- **Simplifying regulations and reducing bureaucratic barriers** for foreign investors and traders to improve the business environment.
- **Establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs)** with advantageous terms for foreign investors, as outlined in the CPEC plans, can attract foreign investment.
- **Strengthening ties with neighbouring countries** and seeking opportunities in Central Asian markets, particularly due to, can foster regional integration and trade expansion.
- **Enhancing education and vocational training** will help develop a skilled workforce that aligns with global market needs, making Pakistan more attractive to foreign investors.
- **Advancing in the value chain** within key sectors, such as textiles, by shifting from exporting raw materials to producing finished goods, will improve value addition and boost competitiveness in international markets.

Recall and review

11. What is the World Trade Organization (WTO), and how does it influence Pakistan's trade?
12. Outline steps Pakistan can take to expand its trade partnerships and increase the economic value of its exports.

Stretch yourself

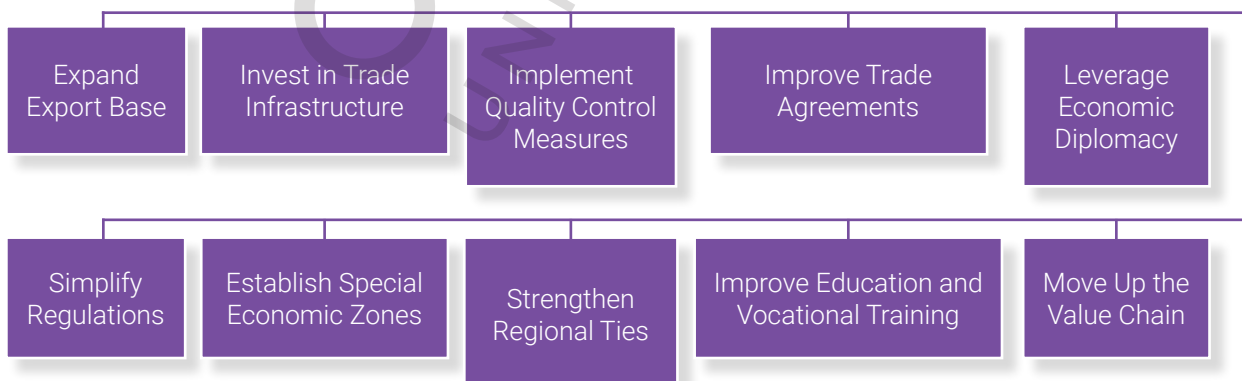
Using the Internet, assess the role of the WTO in resolving trade disputes for Pakistan.

Building skills

E

Compare the economic benefits for Pakistan of being part of SAARC versus the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Steps to Add Trading Partners



Objectives

Students will learn about:

- Trends of urbanisation in Pakistan and the physical and human factors that have affected the rates of growth, including rural to urban migration and the development of megacities (Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad).
- Economic, social, and environmental opportunities created by urbanisation in Pakistan, including education, innovation, and investment.
- Economic, social, and environmental challenges created by urbanisation in Pakistan, including employment, housing, and forms of pollution.
- The importance of urban areas for economic development in Pakistan, and strategies to supporting improving quality of life in cities.

Getting Started

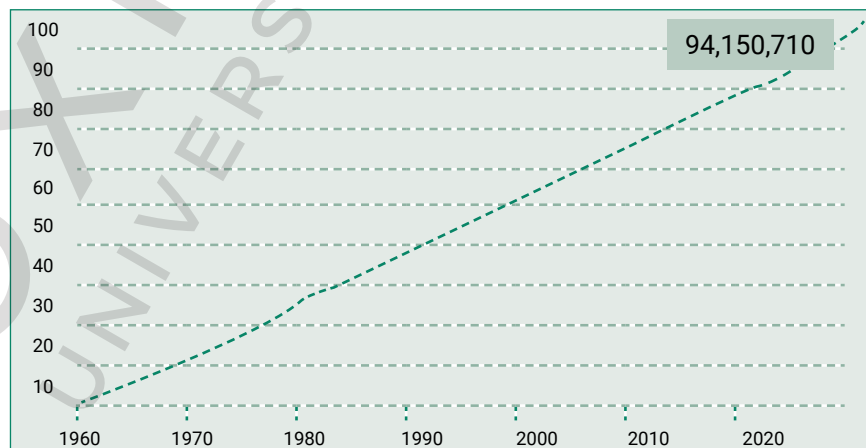
By 2050, it's anticipated that one in seven people globally will reside in urban areas. In fact, by 2050, only a few countries are expected to have a higher rural population than an urban one. Brainstorm and list the socioeconomic and political impact of such development on countries.

8.1 | Factors Affecting Urbanisation

By 2050, the global urban population is projected to reach 6.3 billion, nearly doubling from the 3.5 billion urban residents documented in 2010. This growth will primarily occur in small to medium-sized cities, with almost half of the increase anticipated in Asia. This rapid urbanisation poses both significant opportunities and challenges for nations around the globe, especially those in the Global South.

Trends of Urbanisation

Urban growth in Pakistan is unevenly distributed. Megacities are absorbing the majority of this influx, resulting in overcrowding and a strain on urban infrastructure and services.

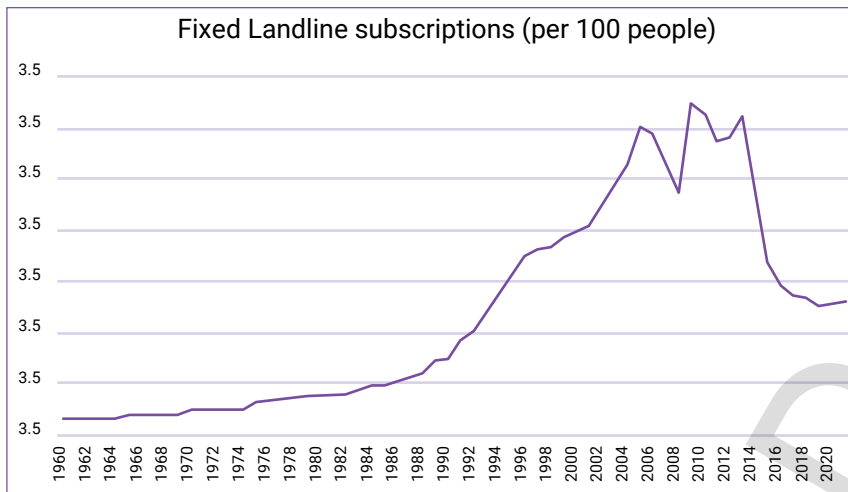


▲ **Figure 8.1: Urban Population in Pakistan (Source: World Bank Data 2023)**

Urbanisation in Pakistan has a long history, beginning with the Partition in 1947, when millions of Indian Muslims migrated and settled in the urban areas of Sindh and Punjab. Subsequent migrations during the wars of 1965 and 1971, as well as the 1979 Afghanistan war, further contributed to the urban influx. Today, urbanisation in Pakistan continues due to ongoing conflict, insecurity, and economic necessity.

Did you know?

Urban areas in Pakistan, excluding Islamabad, are organised into three tiers of divisions, districts, and tehsils by the provincial governments.



▲ Figure 11.1: Space satellite orbiting the Earth

4. Satellite Networks

Satellite networks use signals from satellites to extend connectivity to remote areas, reaching regions with challenging terrain.

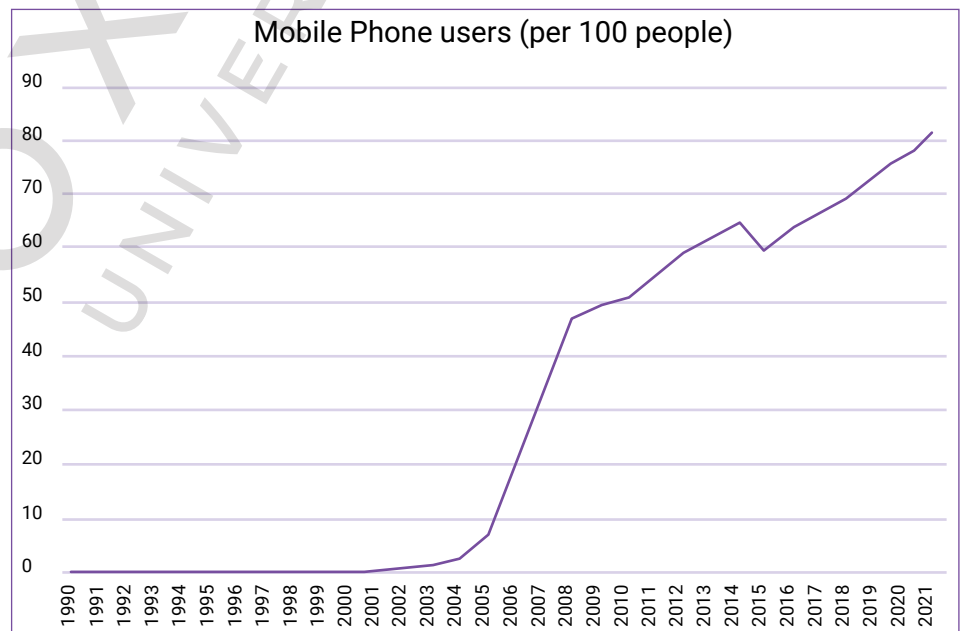
Coastal and mountainous areas often rely on satellite phones for communication during extreme weather events. In Pakistan, satellite networks are managed by SUPARCO and are used for broadcasting, telecommunications, and disaster management.

5. Fibre Optics Network

Fibre optics networks use optical fibres to transmit data over large distances at high speeds, offering higher bandwidth and lower **latency**. In Pakistan, private companies are deploying and operating fibre optics networks to support emerging technologies like 5G.

6. Cellular Network

Pakistan's cellular network has over 126.9 million subscribers and operates on GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications), CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access), and LTE (Long-Term Evolution) technologies. It provides voice calling, SMS, MMS, and Internet services.



▲ Figure 11.2: Source: International Telecommunication Union (via World Bank) (2023)

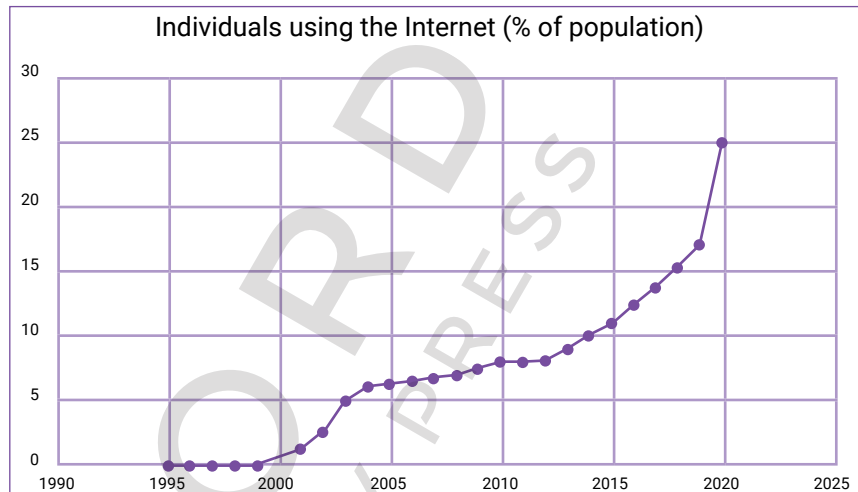
Did you know?

Communication networks in Pakistan are regulated by the PTA, established in 1996 under the Telecommunications Ordinance of 1994. It is responsible for the establishment, maintenance, and operations of telecommunications systems in Pakistan.

7. International Connectivity

Pakistan is connected to the world through a network of submarine cable systems and terrestrial links. These networks include:

- Sea-Me-We 3 (SMW3)
- Sea-Me-We 4 (SMW4)
- Sea-Me-We 5 (SMW5)
- IMEWE
- AAE 1
- TW 1
- PEACE



▲ Figure 11.3: Data Source: World Bank Group (2023)

Recall and review

1. Describe the role of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in regulating the communications sector in Pakistan.
2. Analyse the factors affecting the development of communication networks in Pakistan. Discuss potential solutions or strategies to address these challenges.
3. Identify the changes over time by analysing the trends in fixed landline subscriptions, mobile phone users, and Internet users in Pakistan as shown in the figure. Explain the factors contributing to these trends.

Factors Affecting the Development of Communication Networks

The development of communication networks is influenced by a range of global trends, local circumstances, infrastructure limitations, government regulations, and geographical challenges.

1. Rough Terrain

The mountainous and deserted regions present challenges for establishing and maintaining communication networks due to their rough terrain, extreme weather, and sparse population.

2. Low Investment

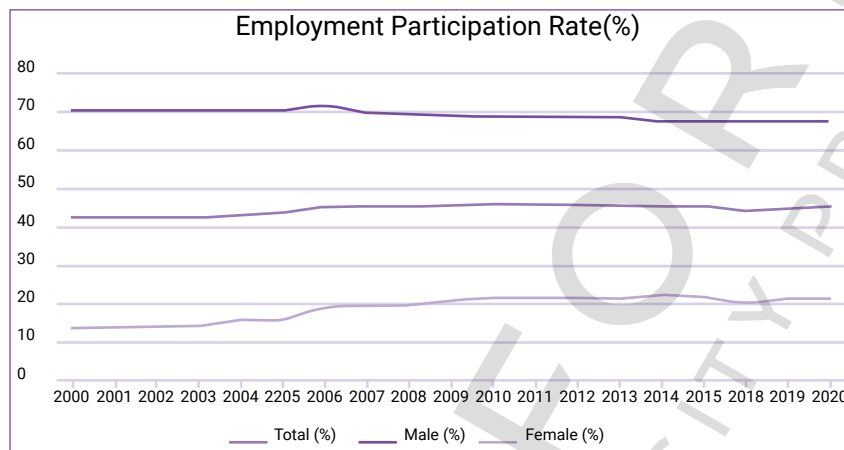
Limited government and private sector investment has hindered the development of advanced communication networks.

3. Inconsistent Policies

Regulatory frameworks and government policies play a crucial role in shaping the development of communication networks. Changes in regulations, licensing requirements, or spectrum allocation policies create uncertainty for telecom companies. Despite inconsistent policies, some initiatives for deregulation and liberalisation have showed positive effects.

ECE programmes can reduce dropout rates and enhance overall educational outcomes by fostering a passion for learning and nurturing vital skills.

4. **TVET programmes** teach practical skills for different jobs. They offer another way to learn for students who may not want to attend college. These are made to meet the needs of local businesses, making it easier for students to find work. By connecting education with employers' needs, TVET can help more people find jobs and strengthen the economy.
5. **Initiatives** like scholarships, conditional cash transfers, and awareness campaigns can encourage families to send their daughters to school. School environments with gender-sensitive facilities can also encourage girls' attendance.



▲ Figure 14.7: Source: pbs.gov.pk (2021)

Improving education and promoting gender equality are fundamental for social development as they foster critical thinking, civic participation, and social cohesion while, ensuring that all members of society can contribute to and benefit from development. Additionally, education and gender equality are key drivers of economic growth, as they enhance job prospects and increase productivity. Moreover, they significantly impact health and well-being by improving health outcomes and reducing mortality rates.

14.4 | Food Security in Pakistan

Food security is a critical aspect of national stability and development. It encompasses the availability, accessibility, and proper utilisation of food. In Pakistan, food security has significant implications for the well-being of its people, the robustness of its economy, and the sustainability of its environment.

Over the years, Pakistan has faced numerous challenges and implemented various strategies to enhance food security and

Case study

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is a targeted and unconditional cash transfer programme focused on supporting low-income women, with long-term objectives that include fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely eradicating extreme poverty and empowering women. The government of Pakistan allocated Rs 400 billion to the BISP to implement the social protection programmes during 2023. BISP is disbursing payments to approximately 9.9 million beneficiaries under the Benazir Kafaalat Programme. In 2023, Rs 128.90 billion was distributed through this programme.

Recall and review

9. Define the term 'gender equality' in the context of education.
10. List three reasons why education and gender equality are important for sustainable development.
11. Compare the benefits of scholarships and conditional cash transfers in promoting girls' education in Pakistan.
12. Explain why early childhood education (ECE) is vital for reducing dropout rates.

ensure that its population has reliable access to nutritious food. Economic fragility, political polarisation, recurrent natural disasters, and high inflation rates deepen vulnerabilities and increase poverty levels, undermining resilience.



▲ **Figure 14.8:** Irrigation of farmland to ensure the quality of the crop



▲ **Figure 14.9:** Steel grain silos used to store grain

Did you know?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 global objectives adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They serve as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030.

Strategies to Enhance Food Security

1. **Modernising agriculture** through the adoption of new technologies, improved farming practices, and high-yield crop varieties through genetically modified crops, precision techniques, and efficient irrigation methods like drip irrigation can significantly boost agricultural productivity. Government initiatives and subsidies for modern farming equipment and training programmes for farmers can further support this transformation.
2. Encouraging the **diversification of crops**, including drought-resistant and high-nutrient varieties, can improve food security. Crop diversification helps mitigate the risks associated with pest infestations and extreme weather conditions, ensuring a more stable food supply.
3. Investing in **modern storage facilities**, such as silos and cold storage units, can prevent spoilage and waste. Enhancing transportation infrastructure ensures timely and efficient distribution of food from surplus to deficit areas, reducing regional disparities in food availability.
4. Programmes aimed at **improving food access** for vulnerable populations can alleviate hunger and malnutrition. Social safety nets, such as food subsidies, ration programmes, and school feeding initiatives, can support low-income households. Community kitchens and food banks can provide immediate relief in times of crisis.

World Food Programme's Country Strategic Plan

World Food Programme's Country Strategic Plan (2023-2027) has aligned with Pakistan's development objectives and the 2030 agenda, with a targeted focus on Zero Hunger (SDG 2). Through critical relief efforts and nutrition support, WFP plays a crucial role in supporting vulnerable populations. WFP also supports the Government of Pakistan to strengthen food and nutrition security, offering policy guidance, technical expertise, and sustainable strategies to fortify food systems and strengthen resilience against climate-related challenges.

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International GCSE Pakistan Studies

Authors: Fazle Karim Khan and Jamil Hasan Kazmi

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