



P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

3. Empowering India's Youth for A Developed Nation

India stands at a unique demographic crossroads. With nearly 65% of its population below 35 years of age, the country possesses the world's largest youth cohort — a demographic asset that economists call the "demographic dividend." The realisation of this dividend, however, is neither automatic nor guaranteed. It requires deliberate, sustained, and multidimensional policy investment in education, skills, health, employment, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. The overarching policy framework anchoring these efforts is the vision of **Viksit Bharat @ 2047** — a developed India by the centenary of Independence.

1. Policy Framework: National Youth Policy

The **National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014** provides the foundational legislative and programmatic framework for youth development in India. It defines youth as individuals aged 15–29 years — a definition that encompasses school students, college graduates, early career professionals, and first-time entrepreneurs across a wide spectrum of life stages. The NYP 2014 identified eight priority areas: education, employment, skill development, health, sports, social participation, empowerment, and civic engagement. The **proposed National Youth Policy 2025** updates this framework to incorporate emerging imperatives — future-ready skills for the digital economy, leadership development, digital participation, and sustainable development — reflecting the dramatically changed landscape since 2014. The evolving policy consensus positions youth not as passive beneficiaries of government programmes but as **active partners in governance and nation-building**.

2. Transforming Education for the Future

The scale of India's educational infrastructure investment in recent years is significant. More than 1.49 lakh schools have been covered under ICT and digital education initiatives. Over 1.76 lakh smart classrooms and 1.79 lakh ICT laboratories have been sanctioned. Residential school initiatives — including Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas for girls and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Awasiya Vidyalayas for disadvantaged communities — have expanded access to quality residential education beyond urban privilege. Hostel facilities under PM-JANMAN and the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan have specifically expanded opportunities for tribal students in historically underserved regions. The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** is the comprehensive transformative framework governing India's education ecosystem. Three mechanisms within NEP deserve particular attention for UPSC purposes. The **National Credit Framework (NCrF)** enables students to accumulate credits across academic, skill-based, and experiential learning streams — dissolving the artificial walls between formal education and vocational training. The **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)** allows students to store, transfer, and redeem credits across institutions without losing academic progress, enabling multiple entry and exit points that are particularly valuable for economically vulnerable students who must sometimes pause their education for financial reasons. The **Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR ID)** creates a lifelong digital academic account that accumulates both academic and skill credits throughout a student's educational journey — a building block of India's digital public infrastructure for education.

Digital learning has expanded dramatically. SWAYAM, India's Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platform, now hosts over 18,500 courses with more than 6 crore enrolments. DIKSHA provides digital learning resources in multiple Indian languages. The **One Nation One Subscription** initiative has expanded access to academic and research journals across all higher education institutions. More than 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs in schools are cultivating an innovation and problem-solving orientation among students from early ages.

3. Building a Skilled and Employable Workforce

The **Skill India Mission (SIM)**, launched in 2015, is the umbrella framework for India's skilling architecture, operating through Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), and Craftsman Training Scheme (CTS) in Industrial Training Institutes.

SOAR (Skilling for AI Readiness), launched in 2025, introduces AI awareness and foundational AI skills to school students from Classes 6 to 12 — and equally importantly, equips teachers to integrate AI concepts into their pedagogy. This recognises that future employment across almost every sector will require baseline AI literacy. The **Prime Minister Internship Scheme (PMIS)**, launched in 2024, provides structured, paid internship opportunities in corporate India to youth — connecting classroom learning with workplace reality and building employment-relevant experience. The **Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH)**, launched in 2023, serves as a unified Digital Public Infrastructure integrating learners, training providers, employers, and government schemes on a single platform.

4. Employment Generation and Entrepreneurship

India's unemployment rate has declined from 7.7% in 2014 to 4.2% in 2025 — a significant improvement, though quality and formality of employment remain concerns. Rozgar Melas, the **Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana** (providing employment-linked incentives to employers and first-time formal employees), and the National Career Service (NCS) Portal collectively address the job-matching challenge across geographies and sectors.

India has emerged as the world's **third-largest startup ecosystem** — with over 2.3 lakh recognised startups, more than 120 unicorns, and nearly half of all recognised startups originating from Tier-II and Tier-III cities. This geographic dispersal of entrepreneurship is significant: it suggests that the startup revolution is not confined to Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi but is generating wealth and employment across a much broader set of cities. The funding architecture — PM MUDRA Yojana, Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups, and the Startup India Investor Connect Portal — has progressively reduced the capital access barrier for first-generation entrepreneurs.

Digital Youth Engagement and Sports

The **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)** platform integrates learning, volunteering, mentorship, career services, and civic participation into a single digital ecosystem for youth aged 15–29. **PMGDISHA**, launched in 2017, has advanced digital literacy in rural India. **Khelo India, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)**, and the **Fit India Movement** collectively address sports participation, elite athlete support, and mass fitness culture.

5. Challenges

1. **Quality-quantity gap in skilling:** Large training enrolment numbers mask weak employability outcomes — certified youth are often found unprepared for actual job roles due to curriculum-industry misalignment.
2. **Credential-job mismatch:** Graduate unemployment coexists with skill shortages in manufacturing and technology — a structural paradox rooted in rigid education-to-employment pathways.

3. **Geographic concentration:** Economic opportunities, quality education, and startup ecosystems remain heavily concentrated in a few large states, leaving aspirational districts and the Northeast underserved.
4. **Gig economy vulnerability:** A significant share of youth employment is in platform-based gig work without social security, EPF coverage, or career progression.
5. **Mental health burden:** Rising competitive pressure, unemployment anxiety, and digital overexposure are creating a growing mental health crisis among youth that existing healthcare infrastructure is not adequately equipped to address.

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