

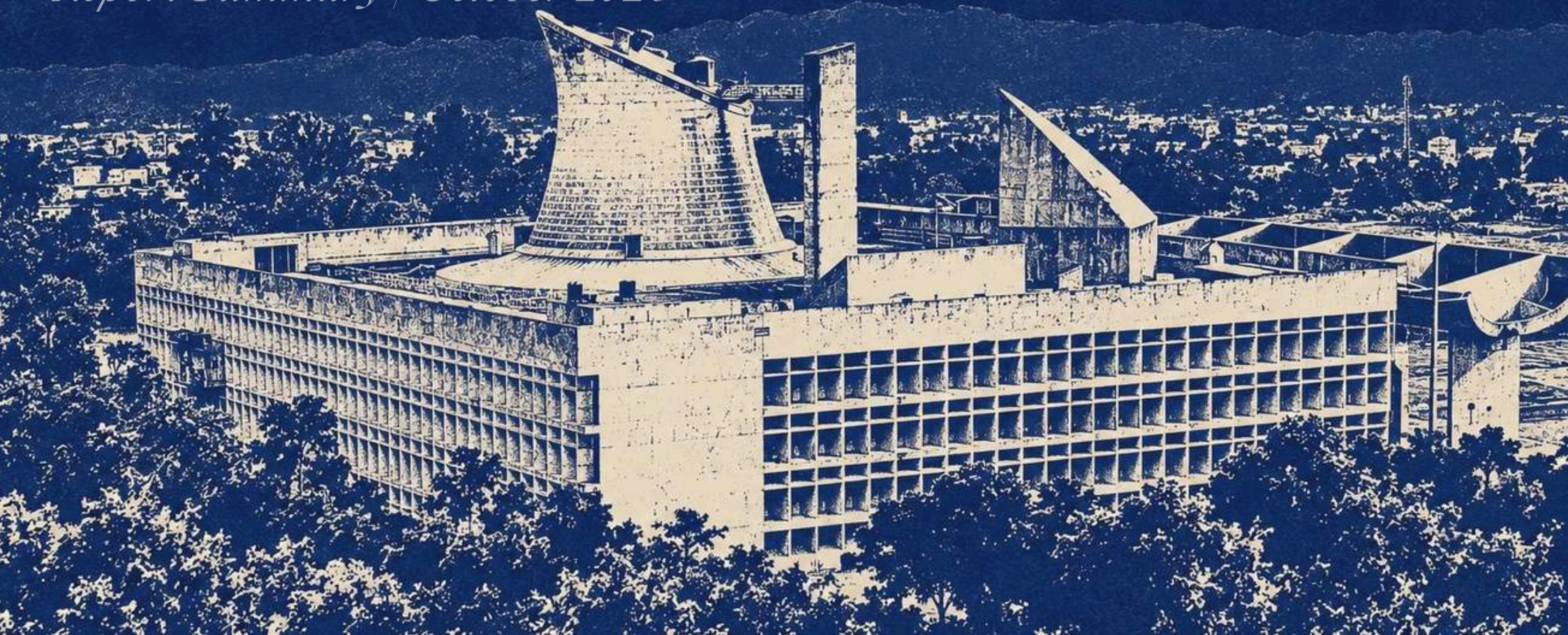
PANJ

Policy Advisory and
Network for Joint Progress

STATE OF PUNJAB

DATA STORY OF 15 YEARS

Report Summary / October 2026



Attribution

PANJ Foundation, *State of Punjab: Data Story of 15 Years*, October 2026.

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For the full report, write to us at info@panj.org.in. *This research report has been prepared in good faith on the basis of information available at the date of publication.*

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PREFACE

Punjab is a state that feels deeply about itself. Its history, its land, its rivers and its young people are subjects of passion in every village square, every family gathering and every election campaign. That passion is a strength. It has carried the state through Partition, the Green Revolution, years of conflict and successive waves of migration. It also carries a cost. Public debate in Punjab often runs ahead of the evidence. A single statistic, a viral video or a claim repeated often enough can settle an argument that the full record would not support. Choices made in this way, at the ballot box, in the household or in government, rest on half the information.

This report begins from a simple premise. Punjabis deserve to know where the state stands, measured on the same scale over time and against the rest of India, before forming a view on where it should go.

Why this report

Much of what is said about Punjab is partly true. The state does face a drug problem, but its scale, its trend and its position relative to other states are rarely stated. Young people are leaving, but official records capture only part of that movement. Public finances are

under strain, but the sources of the strain are seldom set out year by year. Partial truths of this kind persuade more easily than falsehoods, because each contains a fact. Each misleads once the fact is detached from its context: the base year, the national average, the change across periods or the limits of the data.

The information needed to supply that context already exists. Government agencies publish it in budget documents, finance accounts, national surveys, crime records, health accounts and statistical abstracts. It is scattered across hundreds of tables, released on different calendars and written for specialists. Few citizens, journalists or even public representatives have the time to assemble it. This report does that work.

What the report covers

The report draws only on official data published by the Government of Punjab, the Government of India and national agencies, including the Reserve Bank of India, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the National Statistics Office, the National Crime Records Bureau, the Narcotics Control Bureau, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Central Ground Water Board. It covers the State economy and public finance; agriculture, industry and services; employment and unemployment; crime and drugs;

education, health, ageing and migration; and the environment, along with rural development and local bodies.

Each indicator is followed across three periods of about five years since 2012-13 and, wherever the same measure exists, compared with the national level. Each period can be read as a whole, so that the direction of change from one period to the next is visible at a glance. The report presents the record and leaves judgement to the reader.

Why the context matters

A few findings show how the same fact reads differently once it is placed in context. In 2017-18, 13.1 percent of graduates in the labour force in Punjab were without work, below the national figure of 17.2 percent. By 2023-24 the figure in Punjab had risen to 16.9 percent while the national figure fell to 13.0 percent, so a graduate in Punjab now faces a higher chance of unemployment than a graduate elsewhere in India. Households in Punjab paid 60.6 percent of all health spending out of pocket in 2022-23, against 43.4 percent nationally, and the State allocated a smaller share of its budget to health than any other major state. A household in Punjab spent almost twice the national average on each child in school in 2025.

Seen alone, each figure invites one conclusion. Seen beside the trend and the national comparison, it often invites another.

Bridging data and dialogue

Data does not replace feeling, and it should not. The attachment of Punjab to land, language and community gives public life in the state its energy. This report seeks to give that energy a firmer footing. When a claim about Punjab is made, a reader should be able to ask three questions: compared with what, since when and according to whom? This report offers a place to look for the answers.

If the report helps move public conversation in Punjab from assertion to evidence, and from the single figure to the full record, it will have served its purpose. It is offered as a shared reference, one that anyone who cares about the future of Punjab can consult, question and improve.

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Chandigarh | October 2026

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

State Economy and Public Finances

1. Growth has run below the national rate in eleven of fourteen years: Real GSDP grew at 5.4 percent a year between 2012-13 and 2025-26 against 6.2 percent for India. Punjab was ahead only in 2017-18 to 2021-22, because output fell less in the pandemic year; in the pre-pandemic years of that period Punjab grew at 5.4 percent against 5.7 percent.

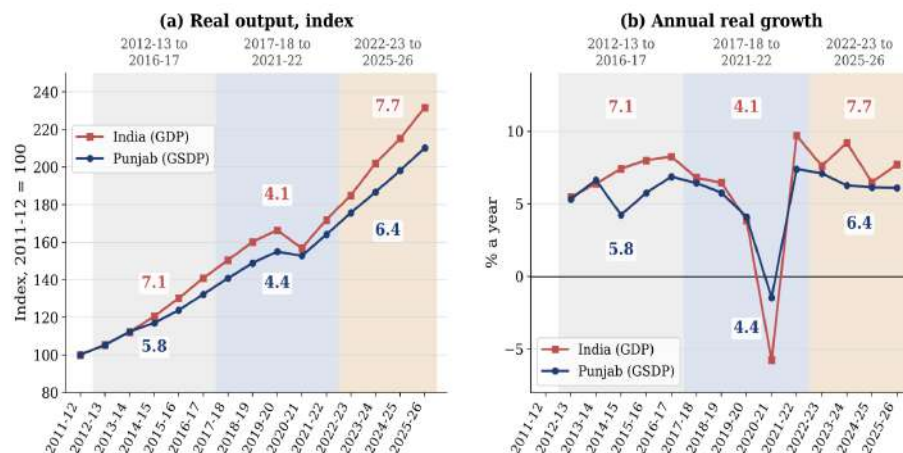


Figure: Real output of Punjab and India: (a) index, 2011-12 = 100; (b) annual real growth (%)

Note: Panel (a) shows cumulative real growth; panel (b) shows the increase in real output over the previous year. Source: Authors' calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25.

2. Incomes have grown more slowly still: Real income per person grew at 3.7 percent a year against 4.7 percent nationally. Punjab remains above the national average, but the margin narrowed from 1.35 times in 2011-12 to 1.19 times in 2024-25.

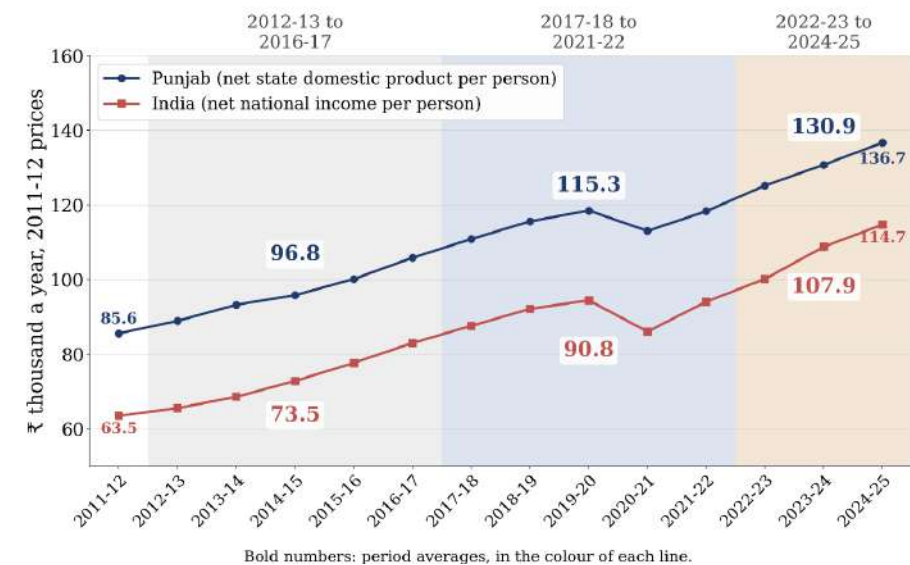


Figure: Real income per person, Punjab and India (₹ thousand a year, at 2011-12 prices)

Note: Net state domestic product per person for Punjab and net national income per person for India. Dashed lines and bold numbers are period averages. Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25 (Punjab) and NSO press notes, 2025 (India).

3. Most borrowing pays for running costs: The revenue deficit averaged 2.7 percent of GSDP against 0.3 percent for all states, and absorbed 70.6 percent of all borrowing against 10.2 percent nationally. It reached 3.9 percent of GSDP in 2024-25, the highest in the series.

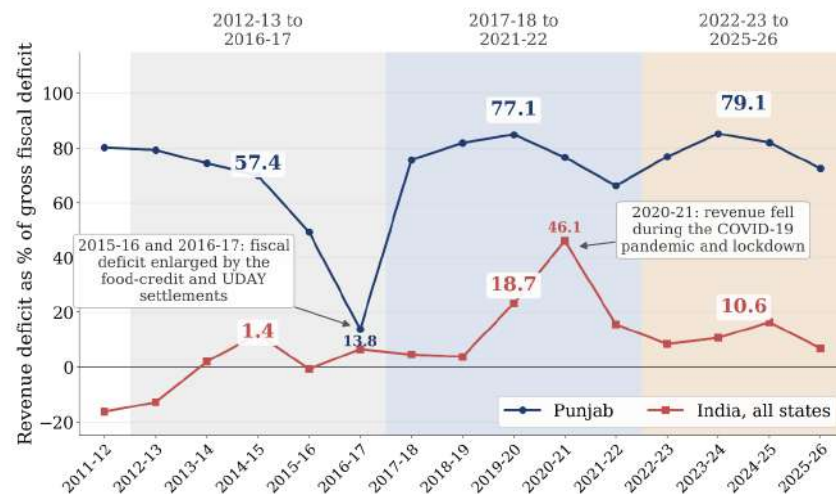


Figure: How much of each year's borrowing went on day-to-day spending (%)

Note: Revenue deficit divided by gross fiscal deficit; a value of 100 means that all borrowing paid for running costs. Dashed lines and bold numbers are period averages. Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25, and RBI, State Finances: A Study of Budgets.

4. Debt has risen by fifteen points of GSDP: Outstanding liabilities rose from 31.1 to 46.4 percent of GSDP between 2011-12

and 2025-26, against about 29 percent for all states. The debt for each resident rose from ₹29,672 to ₹1,23,431.

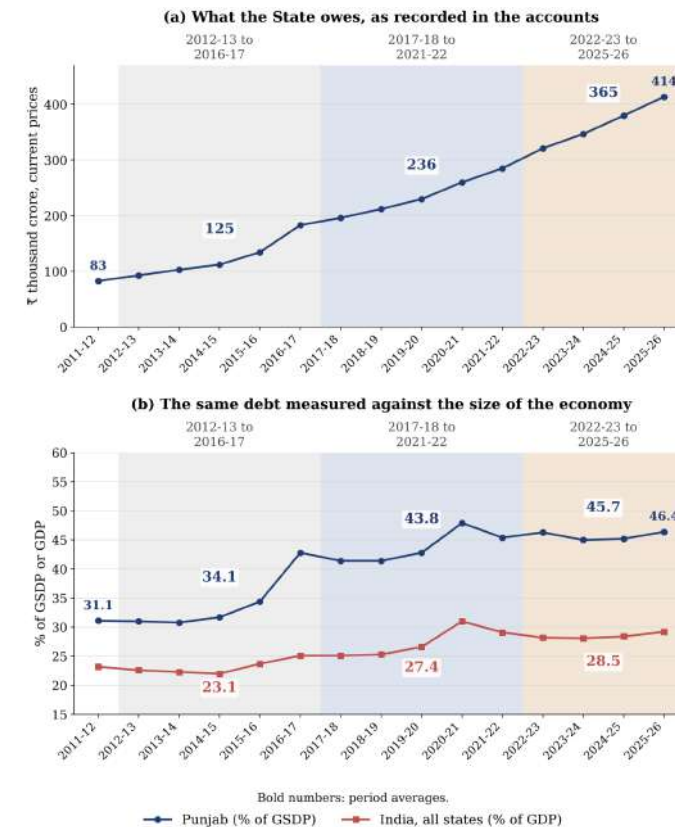


Figure: Outstanding liabilities of the Punjab government, 2011-12 to 2025-26

Note: End-of-year values; panel (a) at current prices, panel (b) a ratio. Dashed lines and bold numbers are period averages. Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25, and RBI, State Finances: A Study of Budgets.

Sectoral Overview: Agriculture, Industry and Services

5. Crop output has grown at a third of the national pace: Real crop value added grew at a trend rate of 0.8 percent a year between 2011-12 and 2024-25 against 2.2 percent nationally, and the share of Punjab in national crop value added fell from 5.10 to 4.33 percent at constant prices and to 3.54 percent at current prices by 2023-24.



Figure: Real crop value added, Punjab and India: (a) index, 2011-12 = 100; (b) Punjab's share of India (%)

Note: Panel (a): bold numbers are compound annual growth in each period (%). Panel (b): bold numbers are period averages. Constant 2011-12 prices. India ends in 2023-24. Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25.

6. Land and water are used to the limit: Rice and wheat occupy four of every five hectares sown, against fewer than two in five nationally; almost all cultivated land is irrigated; and extraction of groundwater has exceeded recharge by 57 to 66 percent in every assessment since 2017.

Table: Land use and irrigation by period

Indicator	2012-13 to 2016-17	2017-18 to 2021-22	2022-23 to 2024-25
Net irrigated area, % of net sown area, Punjab / India	99.8 / 48.8	100.0 / 53.4	99.7 / 57.8
Cropping intensity, Punjab / India (%)	189.8 / 142.2	190.3 / 149.9	201.6 / 156.4
Rice and wheat, % of gross sown area, Punjab / India	81.5 / 37.4	83.1 / 35.8	80.4 / 36.3
Net sown area, Punjab (lakh hectares)	41.4	41.2	41.1

Note: Period averages; land use data end in 2023-24. Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25 (from the Annual Survey of Industries, NSO).

7. Industry has grown at the national rate, in smaller

factories: Industrial value added grew at 5.5 percent a year in both Punjab and India between 2011-12 and 2024-25. Value added per person in the factory sector rose from 50.3 to 60.7 percent of the national level.

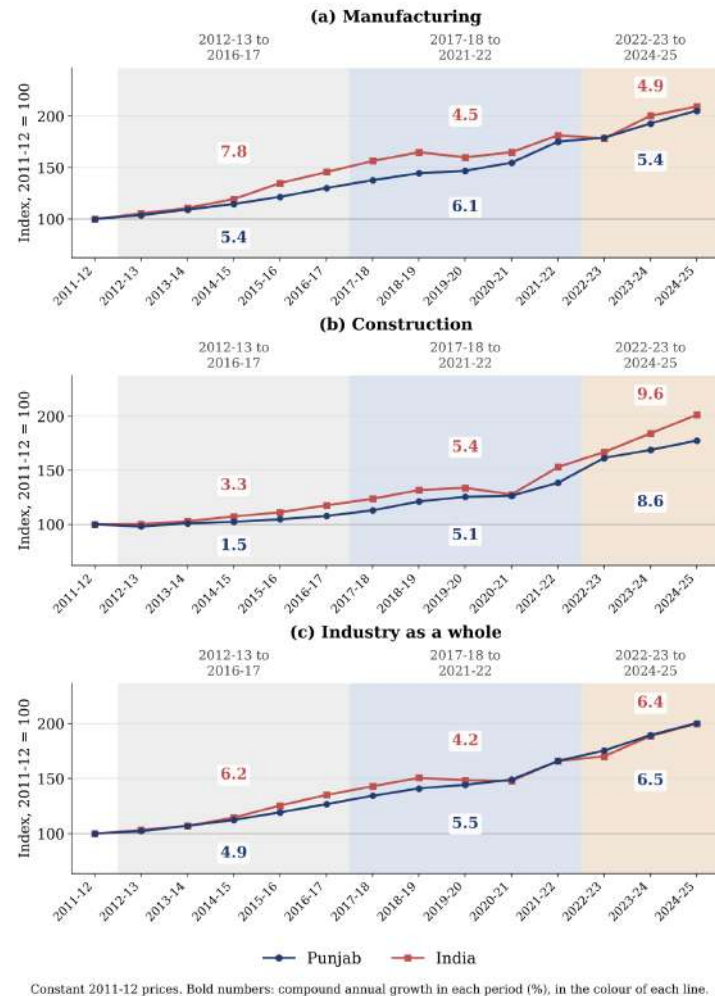


Figure: Real GVA of manufacturing, construction and industry: Punjab and India (index, 2011-12 = 100)

Note: Constant 2011-12 prices. Bold numbers are compound annual growth in each period (%); labels give the 2024-25 index. Industry covers manufacturing, construction, and mining and utilities. Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25 (Punjab) and NSO, national accounts press notes, 2025 (India).

8. Services are now the largest sector but have grown more slowly than nation growth: Services rose from 43.8 to 51.7 percent of real GVA between 2011-12 and 2024-25, and grew at 6.3 percent a year against 6.9 percent nationally; Punjab grew faster only in 2017-18 to 2021-22.

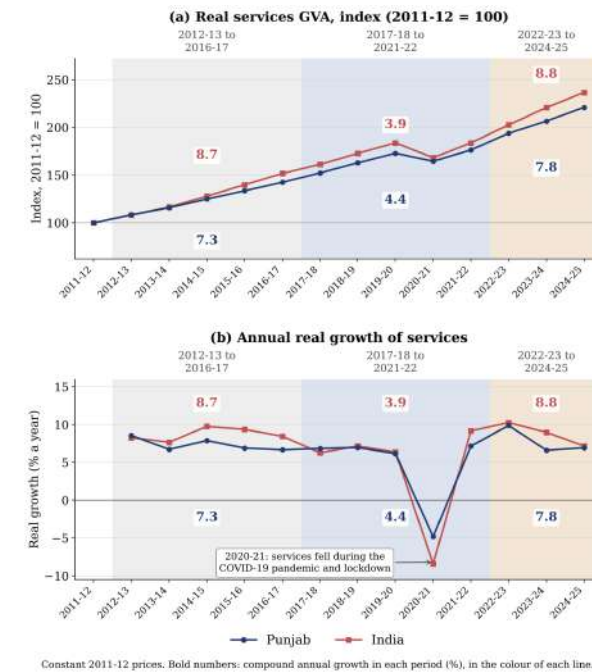


Figure: Real services GVA and its annual growth: Punjab and India

Note: Bold numbers are compound annual growth in each period (%). Source: Author's calculations based on RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25 (Punjab) and NSO, national accounts press notes, 2025 (India).

Employment

9. Rural unemployment in Punjab is well above the national rate, and the gap has widened: Rural unemployment averaged 7.1 percent in 2017-18 to 2021-22 against 4.2 percent in India, and 5.8 against 2.5 percent in 2022-23 to 2023-24. Both rates fell, but the national rate fell faster, so the gap rose from 2.9 to 3.4 percentage points. Urban rates stayed within 0.6 points of the national rate.

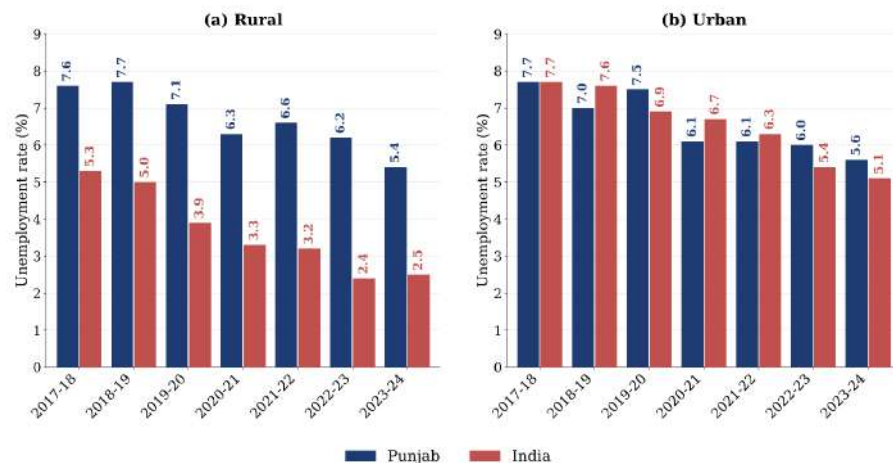


Figure: Unemployment rate, rural and urban, Punjab and India, 2017-18 to 2023-24 (%)

Note: Persons aged 15 and above, usual status (principal and subsidiary). Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey, Annual Reports 2017-18 to 2023-24.

10. The State payroll has contracted: Government employees fell from 3.17 lakh in 2013 to 2.91 lakh in 2024, or from 11.1 to 8.9 per 1,000 people. Sanctioned regular posts were cut by 44,798 between 2018 and 2024, and about one in four remained vacant in every period. **More than half of semi-government posts are vacant.** Filled posts in boards, corporations and local bodies fell from 1.03 lakh in 2013 to 61,570 in 2024. The vacant share of sanctioned posts rose from 35 percent in 2012-13 to 2016-17 to 54 percent in 2022-23 to 2024-25.

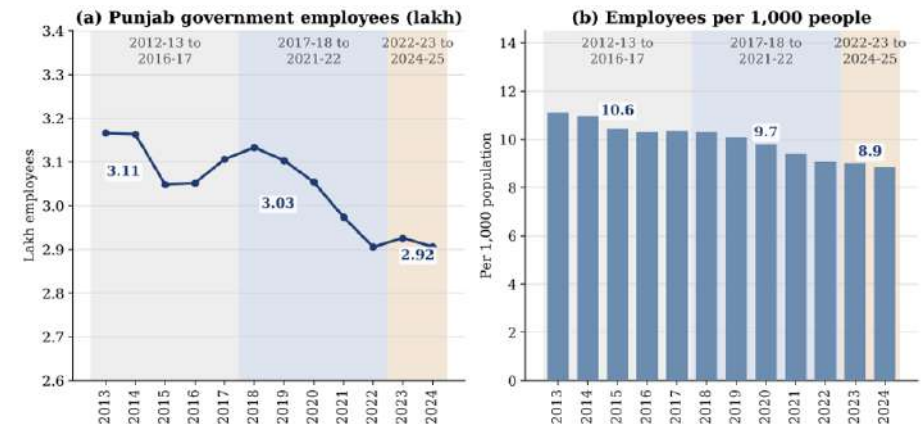


Figure: Punjab government employees, 2013-2024: number and per 1,000 people

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, editions to 2025.

11. Factory employment and training capacity have expanded:

Persons engaged in registered factories rose from 6.07 lakh to 8.11 lakh, and ITI intake from 20,083 to 30,083 trainees a year.

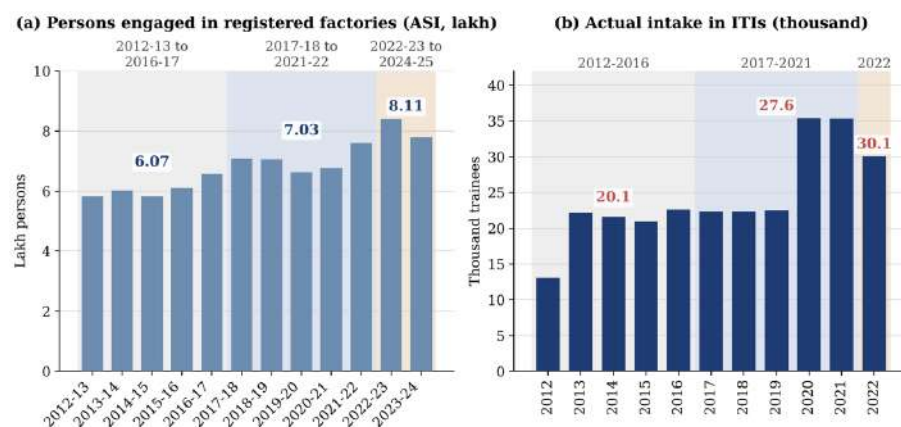


Figure: Persons engaged in registered factories (ASI) and ITI intake, Punjab

Note: Sources: ASI via RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25; Statistical Abstract of Punjab.

12. The rural wage premium has narrowed: The daily wage of male farm labourers in Punjab exceeded the national wage by ₹65 in 2014-15 to 2016-17 and by ₹36 in 2022-23 to 2024-25. At 2014-15 prices the Punjab wage fell by 6.9 percent, while the national wage rose by 5.9 percent.

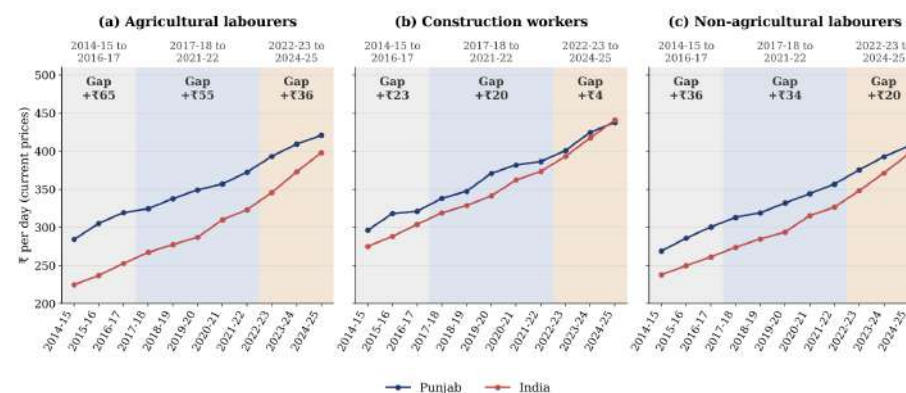


Figure: Daily wages of rural men, Punjab and India, 2014-15 to 2024-25 (₹, current prices)

Note: Gap = Punjab minus India, period average. Source: RBI, Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25 (Labour Bureau).

Crime and Drugs

13. Punjab records less crime per head than India, and the gap has widened: Punjab's share of India's recorded IPC/BNS crime fell in every period, from 1.66 percent in 2007-2011 to 1.25 percent in 2022-2024, against a population share of about 2.3 percent.

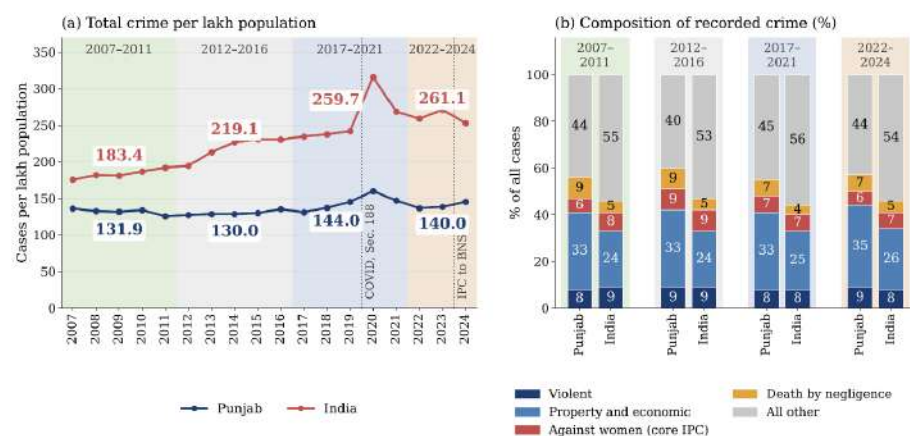


Figure: Recorded crime in Punjab and India, 2007-2024: (a) total cognizable IPC/BNS crime per lakh population; (b) composition of recorded crime by period (% of all cognizable IPC/BNS cases)

Note: Panel (a): bold numbers are period averages; dotted lines mark the COVID-19 year and the change from IPC to BNS. Panel (b): averages of annual shares; "All other" is adjusted so that each bars sums to 100. Source: Author's calculations based on NCRB, Crime in India, 2007 to 2024.

14. Killings and extortion run against the largely reducing crime trend: The murder rate stayed above the national rate in every period. Punjab's share of India's culpable homicide cases rose from 3.3 to 6.9 percent, three times its population share, and its extortion rate rose from 0.19 to 1.28 per lakh while the national rate barely moved.

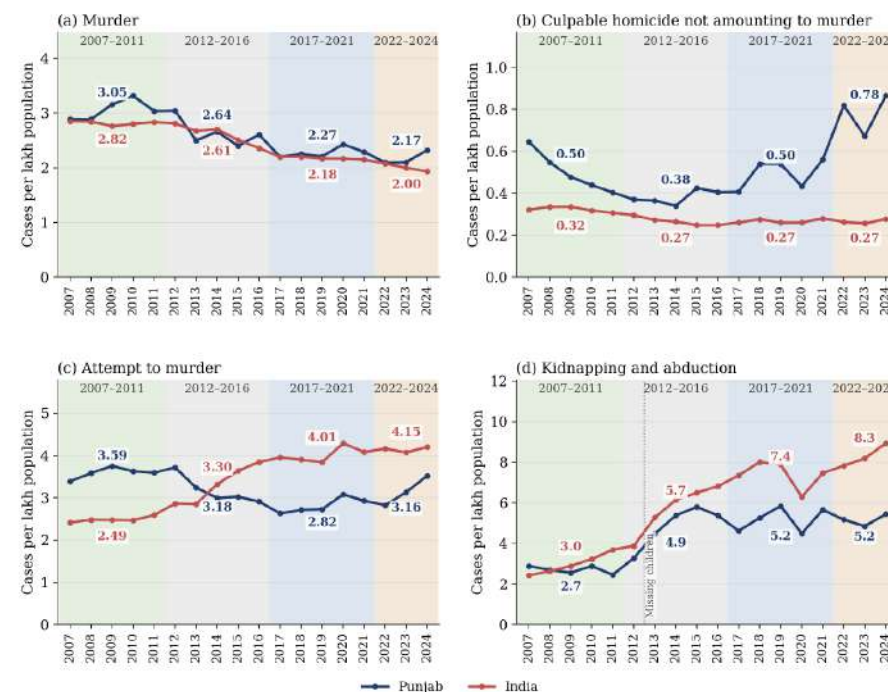


Figure: Violent crime per lakh population, Punjab and India, 2007-2024

Note: Bold numbers are period averages; the dotted line in panel (d) marks the registration of missing children as kidnapping. Source: Author's calculations based on NCRB, Crime in India, 2007 to 2024.

15. Drug use is several times the national level. In 2018, 12.55 percent of Punjab's population aged 10 to 75 had used cannabis in the past year and 9.69 percent opioids, 4.4 and 4.7 times the national rates. Punjab had 11.5 percent of India's opioid-dependent people.

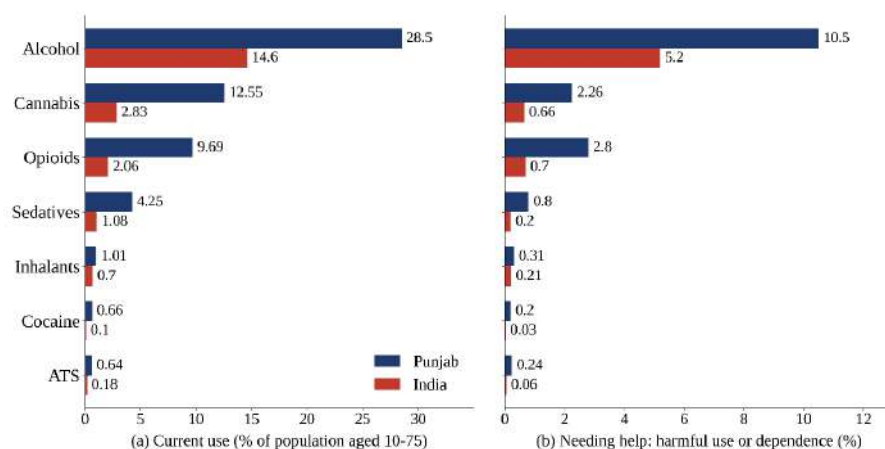


Figure: Drug and alcohol use in Punjab and India, 2018 (% of population aged 10-75)

Note: ATS = amphetamine-type stimulants. Source: Author's calculations based on NDDTC-AIIMS (2019), Magnitude of Substance Use in India.

16. Prisons hold mostly undertrials. Undertrials rose from 60.9 to 78.3 percent of prisoners across the three periods. Punjab held 95.0 prisoners per lakh population in 2022-2024 against 37.9 nationally, and spent about half the national amount per prisoner.

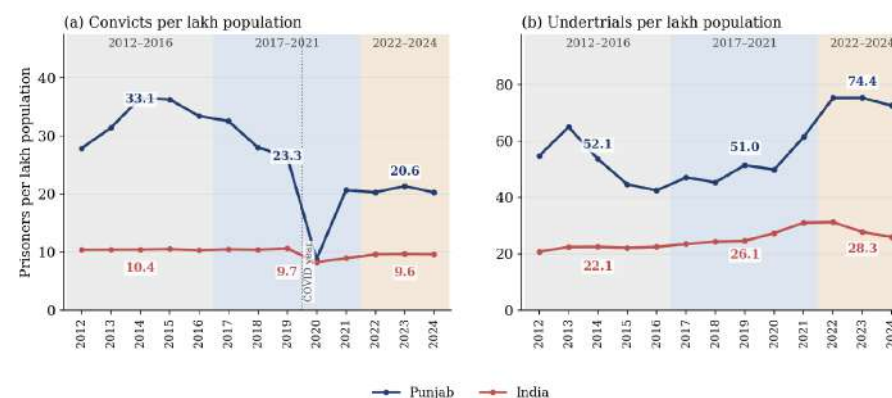


Figure: Convicts and undertrials per lakh population, Punjab and India, 2012-2024

Note: Bold numbers are period averages. Source: Author's calculations based on NCRB, Prison Statistics India, 2012 to 2024.

Human Development

17. Punjab's lead in higher education has almost slipped away.

In 2012-13 to 2016-17, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Punjab averaged 26.4, against a national average of 23.7, a lead of 2.7 points. By 2020-21 the State had fallen below the national average (26.3 against 27.3), and it remained there in 2021-22 (27.4 against 28.4). From 2022-23 onwards Punjab is back in front, averaging 30.3 against 29.8, but the lead is now only 0.5 points.



Figure: Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education (18-23 years), Punjab and India, 2012-13 to 2023-24 (%)

Note: Bold numbers are period averages. Source: AISHE reports, 2012-13 to 2023-24.

18. Punjab has many colleges, but each enrolls fewer students and most are privately run. Punjab has had about as many government colleges for its young as national average: 6.4 to 6.6 for every lakh people aged 18 to 23, against 6.2 to 6.4 nationally. Private unaided colleges rose from 60 percent to 73 percent in 2023-24.

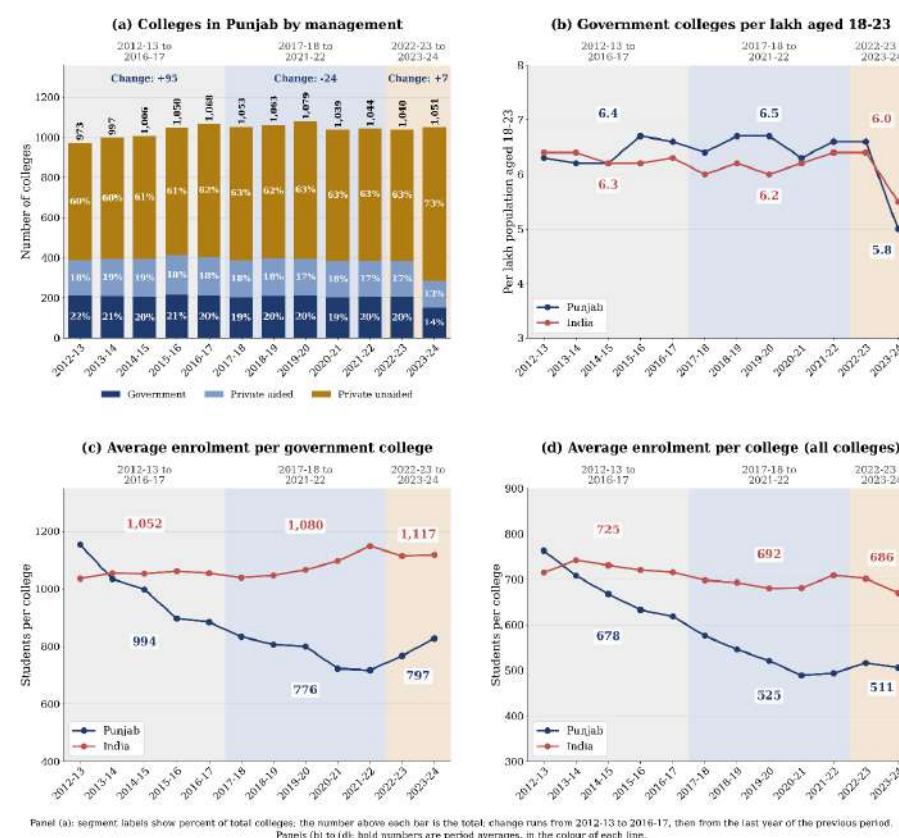


Figure: Colleges by management, govt. colleges per lakh people aged 18-23, and avg. enrolment

Note: Colleges by management are estimated from responding colleges. Source: AISHE reports, 2012-13 to 2023-24.

19. Punjab's health advantage is shrinking. In 2012 to 2016, life expectancy at birth in Punjab averaged 71.5 years, against 67.9 nationally. The lead is only 0.7 years since 2022 (70.8 against 70.1), mainly because life expectancy among men in the State fell from 71.0 years in 2012-16 to 68.8 years in 2019-23. Death rate was below the national rate in 2012-17 (6.4 against 6.7 per 1,000), moved above it from 2017, and averaged 7.6 against 6.5 from 2022 onwards. Infant mortality is the exception: it has fallen from 24.4 to 16.3..

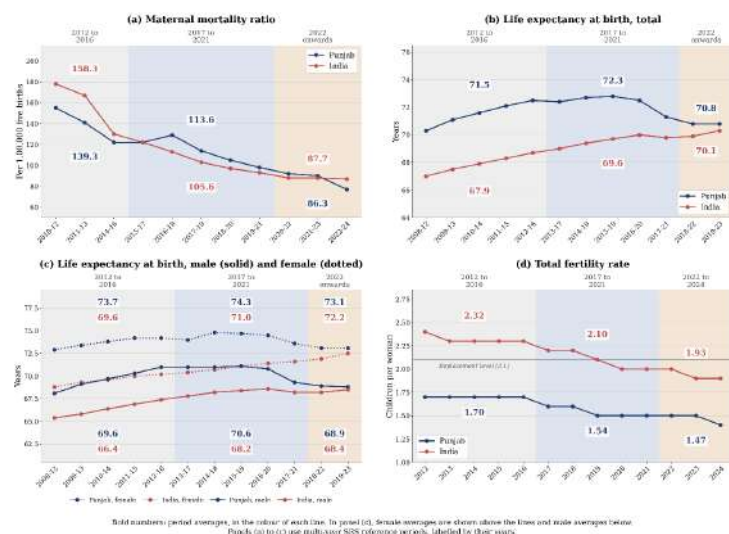


Figure: Maternal mortality, life expectancy at birth and total fertility rate, Punjab and India

Note: Bold numbers are period averages. Source: Sample Registration System, RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2025-26; SRS Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality 2022-24.

20. Punjab is growing old ahead of the rest of the country. In 2012 there were 2.40 children aged 0 to 14 in Punjab for every person aged 60 and above, against 3.51 nationally. By 2024 there were only 1.67, against 2.47 nationally. Over the same years, the share of older persons rose from 9.9 to 11.5 percent of the State's population, against a rise from 8.3 to 9.7 percent nationally. The national age structure in 2024 is therefore close to where Punjab's was in 2012.

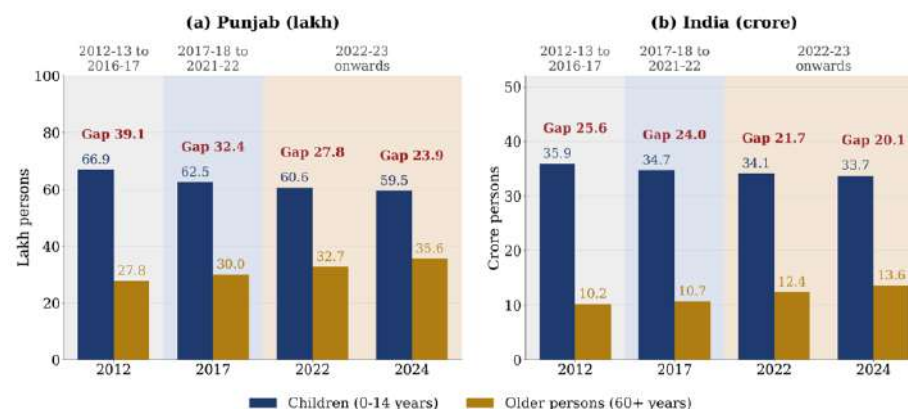


Figure: Estimated number of children (0-14 years) and older persons (60 years and above), Punjab (lakh) and India (crore), 2012, 2017, 2022 and 2024

Note: Gap = children minus older persons. Source: Author's calculations based on SRS Statistical Reports 2012, 2017, 2022 and 2024, and National Commission on Population (2020), Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections 2011-2036.

21. Estimated cancer cases in Punjab rose from 39,521 in 2021 to 43,196 in 2025. The incidence rate rose from 130.0 to 138.5 per lakh population, against 110.7 nationally.

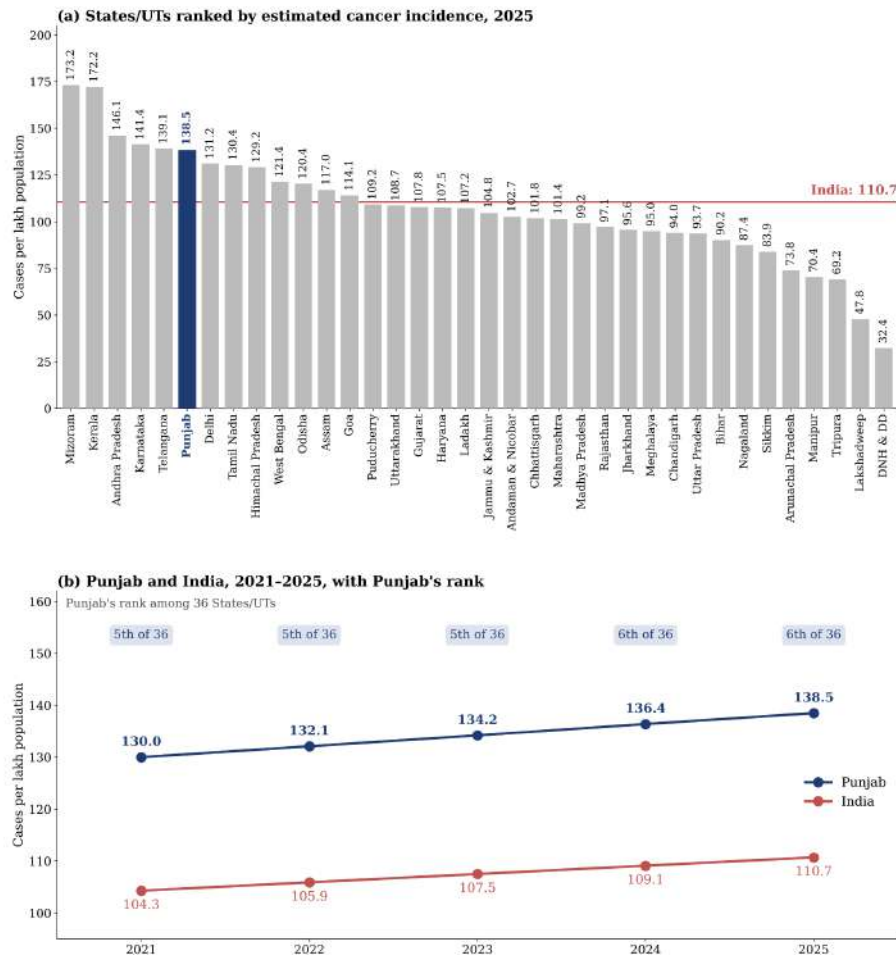


Figure: Estimated cancer incidence in 2025, and Punjab and India from 2021 to 2025

Note: Rank 1 = highest of 36 States and Union Territories. Source: ICMR-National Cancer Registry Programme, via Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 931 (24 July 2026)

22. Tourism in Punjab has not returned to its pre-pandemic level. The state's share of domestic visits in 2024 was less than half of its 2016-2018 level.

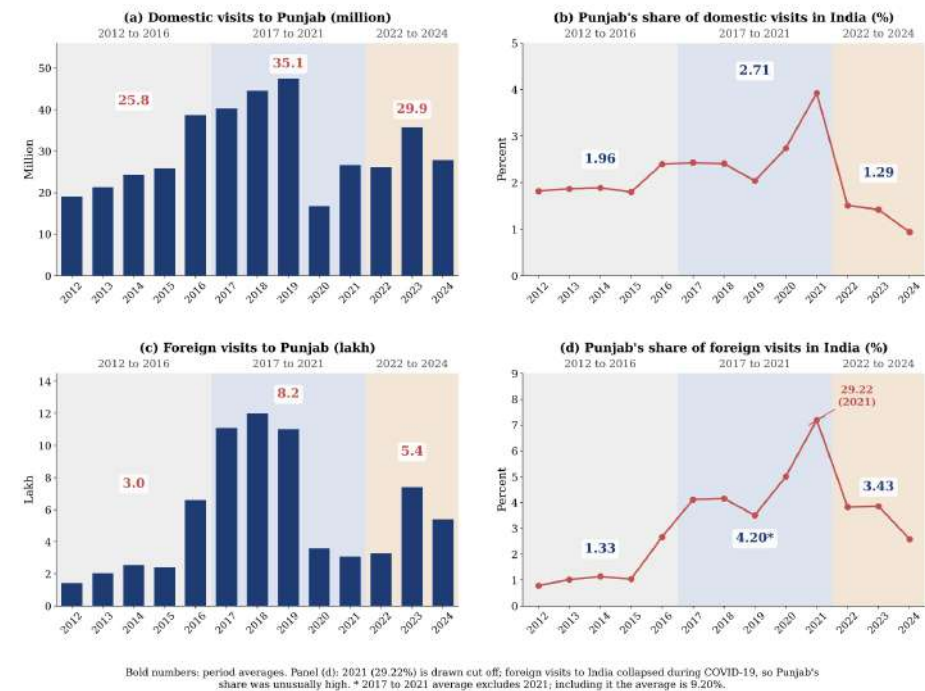


Figure: Tourist visits to Punjab and Punjab's share of the national total, domestic and foreign, 2012 to 2024

Note: Dashed lines and bold numbers are period averages; some 2024 values are estimates. Source: India Tourism Statistics, via RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian States 2024-25.

Environment

23. The registered base of water-polluting industry halved.

Small units with an effluent treatment plant averaged 3,097 in 2012-13 to 2016-17 and 1,462 in 2017-18 to 2021-22, and recovered only to 1,903. Untreated small units peaked at 60 in 2017.

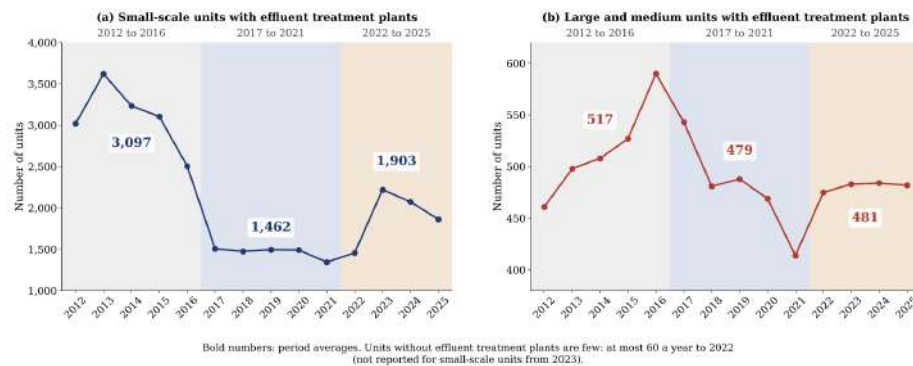


Figure: Water-polluting industrial units with effluent treatment plants, Punjab, 2012-2025

Note: Dashed lines and bold numbers are period averages. Source: Author's calculations based on Statistical Abstract of Punjab (Punjab Pollution Control Board data), editions to 2025.

24. Pollution sits at known points. BOD in the Satluj below Ludhiana's Buddha Nallah averaged 41.4 mg/l in 2017-18 to 2021-22, with a peak of 74.8 in 2018, and 29.6 mg/l from 2022, ten times the bathing limit. Ghaggar's median BOD has stayed near 18 to 20 mg/l throughout.

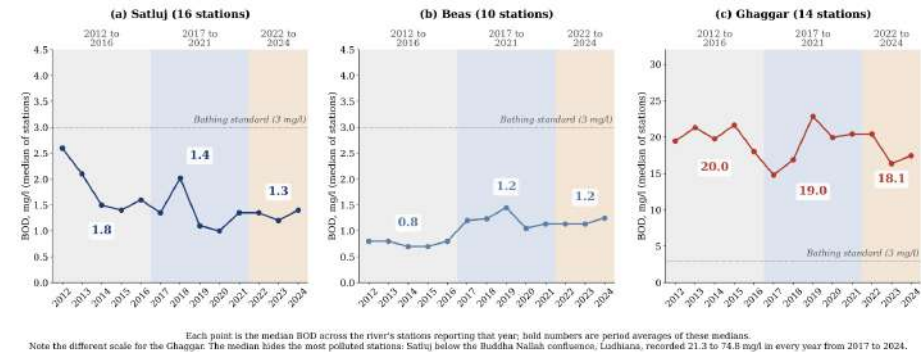
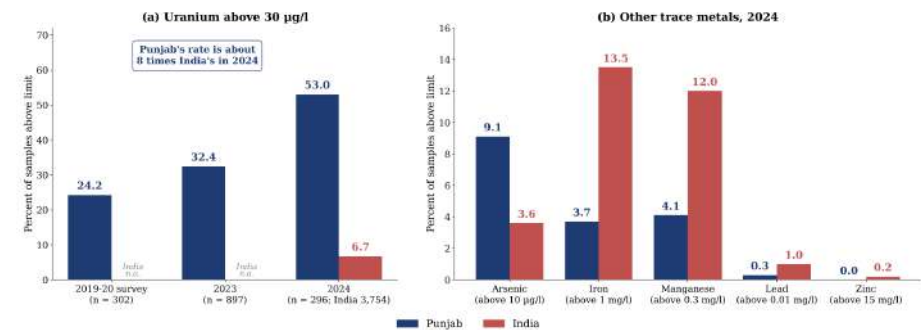


Figure: Median BOD by river, Punjab, 2012-2024 (mg/l)

Note: Median of station annual avg; bold numbers are period avg; dotted line marks bathing standard. Source: Author's calculations based on PPCB river monitoring data and Statistical Abstract of Punjab.

25. Uranium is the outlier underground. Uranium above 30 $\mu\text{g/l}$ was found in 24.2 percent of Punjab samples in 2019-20 and 53.0 percent in 2024, against 6.7 percent nationally. After 2024 monsoon Punjab share was 62.5 percent, highest of any state.



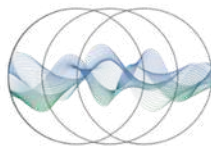
2023 and 2024 values are pre-monsoon samples. Panel (a): the 2019-20 figure is from a separate uranium survey, so the networks differ; in 2024 the post-monsoon share was 62.5% for Punjab and 7.9% for India. Panel (b): Punjab 296 sites; India 2,537 to 3,415 samples depending on the metal. n.a.: India figure not published.

Figure: Groundwater samples above limits for uranium and other trace metals, Punjab and India (%)

Note: Panel (a) rounds use different wells; panel (b) Punjab uses 296 sites; India 2,537 to 3,415 samples by metal. Source: Author's calculations based on Central Ground Water Board, Annual Ground Water Quality Reports 2019 to 2025, and CGWB uranium survey (2019-20).

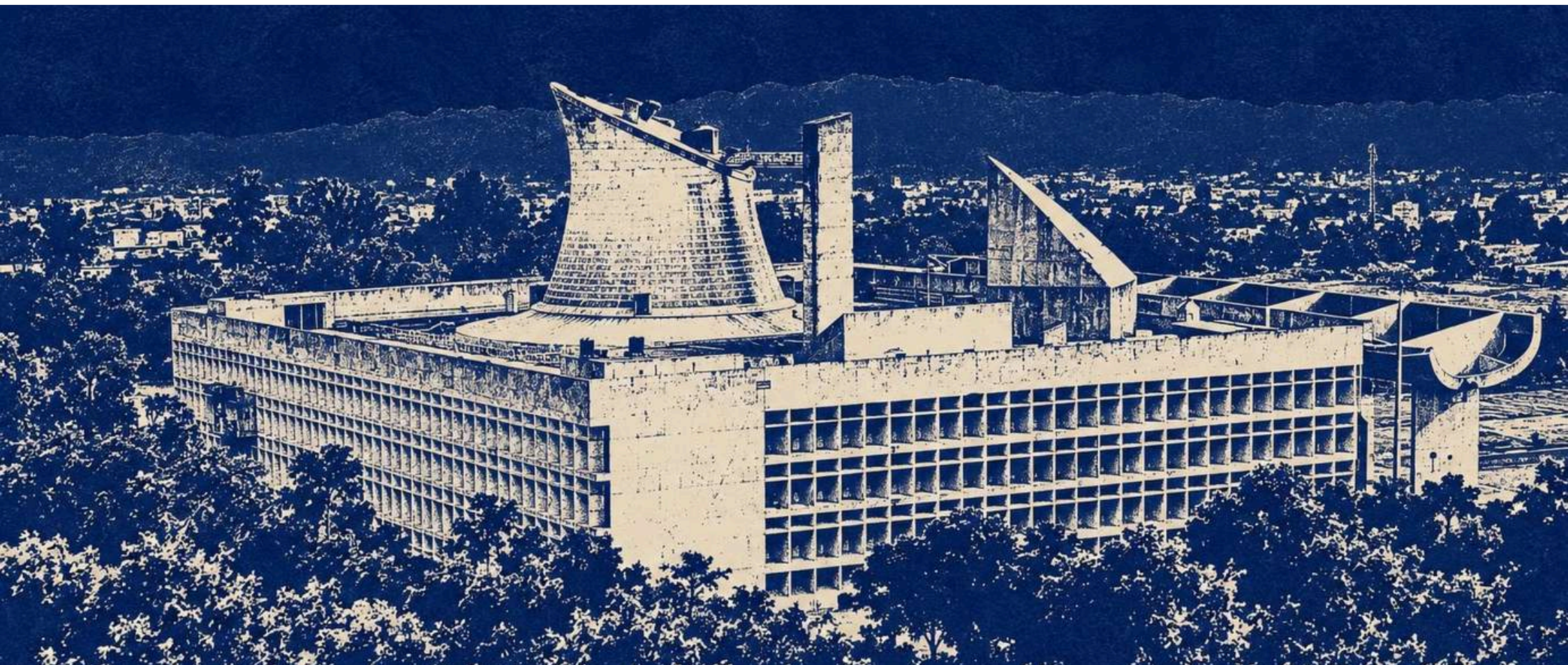
About PANJ Foundation

PANJ Foundation is a sub-national policy research organisation based out of Punjab, India. Established in February 2024, PANJ operates as an independent organisation, providing research-based, evidence-backed inputs and consultations to ensure socio-economic growth of Punjab. PANJ works as a collaborative front for initiating institutional and policy reform in the state of Punjab focused on enhancing ease of living. We use our connection and familiarity with the lands of Punjab to inform reforms that ensure greatest benefits for its citizens. www.panj.org.in | info@panj.org.in



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