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Sonipat

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Executive Summary



2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations Human Development Programme's Human Development Report (HDR) 2025 ranked India 130 out of 193 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI), marking a steady rise in the country's ranking over the years. India continues to remain in the medium human development category. In India, 14 states were in the high human development category in 2017-18, and Haryana was one of them. The contribution of HDRs to a better understanding of critical development parameters has been well acknowledged and reflected in the continued production of these reports at the global level (documenting the progress of countries) and at the national level (documenting the progress of states within a country). While India has been producing HDRs at the sub-state level for over two decades now, they have been prepared for only some districts across eight states. With this district HDR for Sonipat, the number of states with at least one district HDR increases to nine.

Sonipat is one of the 22 districts of Haryana, located in the western part of the state, sharing borders with the national capital, Delhi, and the state of Uttar Pradesh. The district holds historical significance and is classified today as a peri-urban area undergoing significant contemporary agrarian, ecological, and spatial transformations. The Sonipat Human Development Report casts light not only on prevailing outcomes but also on the processes, disparities, and choices that shape the district's future. The Report strives to provide disaggregated, context-sensitive evidence across seven themes – governance, health, education, livelihoods, spatial transformation, basic services, and environment – to support targeted development in the district's shifting landscape and evolving challenges. It draws upon the rich tapestry of local knowledge, demographic detail, administrative records, and available secondary representative datasets to benchmark the district's performance for each theme. The formulation of HDI has not been attempted in the report for want of the necessary data enabling district-wise comparison. Cross-district comparisons of HDI may be misleading owing to limited and often outdated district-level data. This report focuses on Sonipat's intra-district dynamics, highlighting its progress over time while capturing the nuances and barriers to human development across communities.

Governance

Governance is the cornerstone required for transforming development priorities into actual lived realities for people. The district of Sonipat demonstrates strong foundational infrastructure, such as complete road connectivity and significant advances in e-governance. However, they remain shadowed by persistent challenges in law and order, judicial delays, participation gaps, and the resilience of exclusionary social institutions.

Based on a careful study of the district's administrative and institutional setup, this report proposes policies to improve governance by focusing on peace, justice, and strong institutions. Below are some of the recommendations made towards this pursuit –

- Deepen decentralised governance by **strengthening block- and panchayat-level capacities** for participatory planning, budgeting, and monitoring.
- Prioritise **legal literacy**, access to justice, and expansion of alternative dispute resolution to address pendency, reduce crime, and improve responsiveness to vulnerable groups.
- Promote **inclusive representation** and leadership among women, Scheduled Castes, minorities, and youth within local governance structures.
- Leverage **technology platforms** for transparency, direct beneficiary engagement, grievance redress, and monitoring service delivery in real-time.
- Collaborate with universities and civil society to create district "observatories" for human development—tracking progress, convening dialogue, and amplifying citizen voice.

Health

A healthy population is foundational to improving well-being and economic productivity. Sonipat is doing better than most other districts in the state of Haryana and, by comparison, the state and national averages on many indicators. An assessment of Sonipat's health metrics reveals positive advances in increased institutional deliveries and life expectancy. The infant mortality rate (IMR) in the district is also nearing the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target for IMR. Alongside, however, it also underscores gaps in child and maternal health, nutritional status, mental health, and non-communicable diseases. These get further aggravated by socio-economic inequities, climate-linked vulnerabilities, and a large informal migrant population.

Based on the analysis for the Sonipat HDR, below are some of the key takeaways and recommendations for enhancing health outcomes for the population of Sonipat –

- Prioritise universal and equitable access to primary care by setting up of **200 additional Sub-Centres (SCs)** to existing 164 functioning centres, **30 additional primary health centres (PHCs)** from the existing 33 PHCs, and **9 additional community health centres (CHCs)** to the 7 functioning centres to bridge infrastructural gaps and reduce out-of-pocket costs.
- Correspondingly all the **human resource positions** in these facilities needs to be filled on a permanent basis.
- Payment of **minimum wages** to all ASHA and Anganwadi workers.
- Boost social health protection for migrants, low-income workers, and informal-sector workers through **portable entitlements and mobile health units**.

Education

The district's journey in education reflects both its position as an institutional hub and the persistence of stark disparities that undermine human capital formation. Access to education has expanded significantly, with literacy rates among youth and

primary school attendance reaching near universality. Haryana's flagship schemes for girls, Scheduled Castes, and Economically Weaker Sections have strengthened inclusion and retention. Yet, challenges in learning quality, dropout rates among the marginalised and rural populations, gender gaps, and digital divides remain critical. At the same time, the composition of the education workforce reveals a mixed picture with Sonipat's higher education cadre achieving notable gender balance but non-teaching cadre continuing to be male-dominated, highlighting persistent occupational segregation.

Using analysis from representative, large-scale survey data, we put forth the following key recommendations for improving the education landscape of Sonipat –

- Connect **industrial corridors to digital and vocational training facilities for women and young people** in the community. Currently, institutes like Japan-India Institute for Manufacturing (JIM) Sonipat provide manufacturing skills but have limited outreach to women and rural youth, which could be further expanded.
- Expansion of ITI Centres: Establish **ITIs specifically for Persons with Disabilities (PWD)**. Currently, there are none.
- **Promote private investment in ITIs.** In Haryana, approximately 55 per cent of ITI centres are government-run. In Sonipat, about 70% are government-owned, leaving only 30% managed by private entities, which suggests limited private participation in this sector.
- **Expanding Vocational Training Institutes:** Sonipat currently has only six vocational training institutes, while the average district in Haryana has about ten. Expanding these centers will enhance skill development and employability among the youth.
- Increase share of **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** in teaching staff from the current 3.1 percent to 9 percent, to match the SC student share in higher education.

Livelihood

Decent, productive employment is imperative for India to optimise the benefits of its ongoing demographic dividend. Sonipat's structural transformation has seen labour move from the low-productivity agricultural sector to high-productivity manufacturing and services sectors. However, precarious, informal employment, wage stagnation, and gendered barriers persist. The feminisation of labour, especially in manufacturing and services, has emerged as a positive district hallmark, but wage growth and job quality lag behind. The increase in earnings in Sonipat has been slower than in the rest of the country, despite the positive trend in structural transformation, posing a pressing challenge for well-being. The analysis shows that this is because earnings for women in the services sector have fallen significantly in the last six years.

The study suggests the following recommendations to ensure that the benefits of structural transformation are realised for the entire workforce of the district –

- Target livelihood and employment schemes to align with skills gaps, new economic clusters in the industrial corridor, and the potential of the rural non-farm sector.
- **Expand, monitor, and adapt skill development initiatives, targeting women, Scheduled Castes, and youth** to have access to meaningful skilling and improved linkages to the expanding job markets.
- Protect and enable informal-sector workers (including migrants) through social protection, registration, and inclusion in state and central schemes.
- Prioritise financial inclusion, entrepreneurial training, and access to credit for smallholders, women, and youth, addressing gaps in land ownership, digital literacy, and market access.
- Reward diversification and innovation in rural and peri-urban contexts – linking agrarian transitions, MSME promotion, and digital livelihoods.

Spatial Transformation

Sonipat has witnessed an extraordinary spatial transformation over the last few decades, notably its dynamic industrial and educational expansion, its strategic location within the National Capital Region, and increased connectivity driven by significant infrastructure projects. A diverse set of urban centres, strong industrial nodes, major educational hubs, and new transit corridors propels the district's spatial transformation. These strengths have attracted investment, spurred economic growth, and improved connectivity, anchoring Sonipat as a crucial regional node. However, rapid urbanisation, driven by fragmented governance and speculative markets, has produced uneven development and deepened socio-spatial inequalities, particularly for low-income and migrant populations.

Some of the key recommendations proposed to ensure an equitable and planned transformation of the district include –

- Constitution of a **District Spatial Coordination Committee**, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner to align HSVP, HSIIDC, and municipal plans over the next two years. The committee should develop an integrated District Spatial Framework (2025–2035) linking transport, industrial, and residential zoning to employment and environmental sustainability.
- Strengthen regulation of land and housing markets through **transparent licensing, caps on speculative holdings, and enforcement of inclusionary zoning** for affordable housing.
- Reform land acquisition to guarantee **fair compensation and rights protection**, introducing district-level forums to mediate disputes and improve community participation.
- Provide free bus service for women across the district, enhancing their mobility and economic outcomes.

Basic Services

Sonipat district exhibits notable strengths in basic services, including widespread access to improved water sources, with nearly universal piped or borewell water supply; organised solid waste management with door-to-door collection across urban and rural areas; and steady expansion of electricity connections supporting households and agriculture. The district has multiple sewage treatment plants and is making gradual progress in extending sewerage networks, especially in urban centres. There is a robust waste-to-energy facility and recycling efforts, underscoring effective urban local body management. Despite rapid urban growth, the district's basic infrastructure systems provide a foundation for improving quality of life, though gaps remain in rural and peri-urban sanitation.

The analysis brings forth the following recommendations to improve access to basic services in Sonipat –

- Accelerate expansion and modernisation of sewerage networks and treatment capacity, focusing on peri-urban and rural fringes, to reduce environmental pollution and health risks.
- Extend networked underground drainage to villages closer to at least two industrial estates (Rai, Kharkhoda), to reduce environmental pollution and health risks.
- Implement integrated water resource management to address groundwater overexploitation, promote surface water supply, and regulate private borewell extraction to ensure sustainability.
- Increase affordable housing supply by providing basic infrastructure through coordinated planning that links housing development and service provision, especially for low-income migrant workers. At least 20 per cent of all affordable housing units should be allocated in localities around HSIIDC units.
- Strengthen flood management and drainage maintenance by preventing encroachments, desilting drains regularly, upgrading infrastructure, and enhancing disaster preparedness.

Environment

Environmental and climate vulnerability have emerged as the biggest threats to human existence in recent decades, and the existential challenges they pose for Sonipat are no different. These challenges, specifically in the district, are further aggravated by land degradation, groundwater depletion, air and water pollution, and the loss of common property resources. Environmental health is also entwined with the well-being and economic security of the most marginalised.

Ongoing government interventions, such as the Haryana Clean Air Project (HCAPSD), State Environment Plan (SEP), AMRUT, and the Jal Jeevan Mission, strengthen pollution control, stubble management, and effluent treatment. Scaling these alongside water conservation and equitable land reforms can safeguard health, improve livelihoods, and foster sustainable growth.

The key recommendations emerging from the analysis are listed below –

- Incentivise **adoption of sustainable agricultural practices** (low-residue, organic, diversified cropping, water-saving irrigation) and mechanisation, especially for smallholders and women farmers.
- **Promote women-led Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**: As of June 2025, Haryana has established 179 FPOs, which is fewer than many other states in India. Among these, only a small number are led by women. Supporting the creation of women-led FPOs can enhance market connections and improve access to institutional credit, thereby providing diverse income-generating opportunities.
- Promote **micro-irrigation techniques** and climate-smart land and water management in peri-urban agricultural areas of Sonipat. Currently, the majority of irrigation in Sonipat is done through canals (55.9 per cent) and borewells (44.1 per cent). Micro-irrigation systems such as drip and sprinkler can **reduce water use by 40–60 per cent and increase yields by 15–20 per cent.**

- Introduce incentives (**minimum support prices, buy-back arrangements**) for climate-resilient crops – Diversification into pulses and vegetables increases net returns by over 13 per cent (at a national level) compared to monocropping wheat–paddy.
- Expand **community awareness and school-based environmental education** to foster district-wide stewardship for climate action.

Sonipat is taking steady strides to improve the lived realities of its citizens. However, challenges remain. Data gaps persist in understanding informal livelihoods, local climate impacts, and the needs of vulnerable groups, especially at a district level. Although increasingly participatory, governance mechanisms still face limitations in autonomy and accountability. Gender inequalities continue to shape access to land, employment, health, and political representation, demanding continued, persistent action. The existing challenges have been exacerbated by climate volatility and urban expansion, requiring new forms of adaptive policy and stakeholder engagement. By grounding analysis in multidimensional indicators, foregrounding both structural barriers and creative solutions, and seeking convergence and coordination across groups and sectors, the Sonipat HDR aspires to drive not only short-term interventions but also long-term, resilient transformation.

Attention must be focused on integrating sectoral initiatives – such as education with livelihoods, climate action with health, and governance with social inclusion – to foster cross-cutting solutions and maximise the return on public expenditure. Women's empowerment, land rights, innovative housing and rental schemes, environmental stewardship, and strategic spatial reforms are proposed as the necessary levers for promoting inclusive progress in the district. Further, monitoring, periodic review, and adaptive planning will be essential prerequisites for translating policy into sustained change. The Sonipat HDR is thus designed not as a static assessment but as an ongoing venture to facilitate the government, civil society, researchers, and citizens in benchmarking progress, adjusting priorities, and keeping transparency and accountability at the heart of local development. The Report is intended to be a catalyst for collective action. Policy-makers, administrators, civil society organisations, researchers, educators, and Sonipat's communities all form part of the audience and the engine for change. Sonipat HDR marks a new chapter for the district – a district aware of its strengths and challenges, determined to the cause of achieving a long, healthy, and creative life for every resident, regardless of gender, caste, or circumstances.



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