

## Language

India has 18 officially recognized languages; Hindi is the official national language. In addition, there are 1,652 dialects spoken today, evolving from different language families corresponding to the different ethnic groups that have come to India. The Indo-Aryan language is the biggest of the language groups in India, spoken by about 74 percent of the entire population. The important languages under this group are Punjabi, Sindhi, Hindi, Bihari, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi, Assamese, Bengali, Oriya, Pahari, Kashmiri, and Sanskrit. Dravidian language forms the second-largest group of languages, spoken by about 25 percent of the Indian population. It is very likely that you will encounter a language barrier in communicating with your sponsored child, as the majority of the children do not know enough English to write a letter. Those who cannot write will be assigned community workers and volunteers who will explain your letters and help the children compose their responses.

## Holidays

Each region of India has its own variation of seasonal and religious festivals. Festivals and fairs are not only associated with gods and goddesses, but with the sun, moon, stars, planets, and nature. These festivals are diversions from the routine of living, and they also serve as an expression of the social and cultural aspirations of the people. It is best to ask your sponsored child what holidays he/she celebrates.

## Religion in India

Hindu is India's most prominent religion. More than 80 percent of Indians are Hindu. 13 percent are Muslim, and slightly more than 2 percent are Christian.

To **Hindus**, Vishnu is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe, according to Hinduism's sacred text, the Padma Purana. His most important task is the preservation of the divine order—the Dharma, which is the natural harmony existent in all things. In Hinduism, all experience is taken into the next life as karma. People with negative karma will end up in a humble position in the next life; people with good karma will hold a high position.

**Islam** is an Arabic word meaning “submission to the will of Allah (God).” Muslims believe that Allah's will was revealed to the prophet Muhammad more than 14 centuries ago and was captured in the Islamic holy book, the Koran (Qur'an). Together with the Sunnah, a collection of sayings attributed to Muhammad, these texts provide a firm basis for religious and social life for all Muslims, including rules for diet, dress, hygiene, and more.

**Christians** are followers of Jesus, a carpenter and a Jew from the city of Nazareth in present-day Israel. Christians believe that Jesus is the only son of God, born of a virgin woman (Mary) in a stable in Bethlehem. His story is told in the New Testament of the Christian holy book, the Bible.

*Additional sources include the CIA World Factbook and State Department websites.*



<b>Population</b>	1.2 billion
<b>Capital City</b>	New Delhi
<b>Official Language</b>	Hindi
<b>Per Capita Income</b>	US\$1,530/year
<b>Youth Literacy Rate</b>	88% male/74% female
<b>Access to Safe Water</b>	96% urban/89% rural
<b>Under 5 Mortality Rate</b>	56/1,000 live births

*Source: The State of the World's Children 2014 (UNICEF)*

The **Republic of India** occupies most of the Indian subcontinent in South Asia. Its neighbor in the west is Pakistan, while in the north are China, Nepal, and Bhutan. In the east is Myanmar. Bangladesh forms an enclave in the northeast. India is bounded in the northeast by the Himalayas, the world's highest and largest mountain range. India's climate varies considerably. The Himalayan region has cold winters with occasional snow. In the northern plains, the winter is cool, with a wide variation between day and night temperatures. South of the plains lies the Deccan plateau, where the temperature varies less. In the winter, nights are cooler in the higher parts of the plateau. The most important feature of the Indian climate is the monsoon, a wind from the southwest or south that brings heavy rainfall in the summer. The torrential rains fall at intervals for a couple of months, making travel and being outdoors difficult.

Plan International USA is part of a global organization that works side by side with communities in 50 developing countries to end the cycle of poverty for children. We develop solutions community by community to ensure long-term sustainability. Our level of community engagement, long-term outlook, and constant focus on the needs and priorities of children is unique among international development organizations. Our solutions are designed up-front to be owned by the community for generations to come, and range from clean water and health-care programs to education projects and child-protection initiatives.



**Plan International USA**  
155 Plan Way • Warwick, RI 02886  
1-800-556-7918 • planusa.org



## A Brief History

The Indus Valley Civilization (2500-1500 BC) was the first to flourish on the Indian subcontinent. It fell in 1400 BC to Aryan invaders, who dominated the area for 2,000 years. The Aryans developed Hinduism, the socio-religious system that is the basis of India's institutions and culture. King Asoka of the Maurya dynasty incorporated the positives of Buddhism in state administration. A golden age of Hindu culture was achieved under the Gupta dynasty, in the fourth to fifth century AD. In 1192, Muslim armies raided India, establishing the Delhi Sultanate, the first Muslim kingdom in India. The small Muslim kingdoms that followed were swept away by Babur, a great Muslim invader from Afghanistan, who established the Mogul empire in 1526. Portugal, which captured Goa in 1510, was the first European nation to gain a foothold in India, followed by the British, French, and Dutch. In 1857, after the bloody Indian Mutiny, control of India was transferred to the British. The Indian National Congress, headed by Mahatma Gandhi, mounted a movement for independence. In 1947, British India was divided into two independent nations: India and Pakistan.

### Plan's work in India focuses on the following programs to enhance the fulfillment of children's rights:

- ☀ Protection from abuse and exploitation
- ☀ Quality education
- ☀ Optimal health
- ☀ Children's participation as active citizens
- ☀ Adequate standards of living
- ☀ Access to drinking water and a clean environment
- ☀ Resilience during emergencies

### Protection from abuse and exploitation

We work to ensure that no child falls out of the social security and safety net and that those who do receive

necessary care, protection, and support of the law and communities. The goals of this program are to reduce emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and neglect of girls and boys; prevent girls and boys from exploitation through child labor and child trafficking; and promote child-safe practices in government and civil society organizations.

### Quality education

Plan envisions that all children have free access to quality education within an equitable system that respects children's rights, especially those of girls, so that they can live a life with dignity. We focus on improving holistic care for the development of children up to 6 years of age and prepare them for formal schooling. We also work to ensure that all girls and boys complete 10 years of quality education in government schools.

### Optimal health

Plan focuses on reducing the incidence of maternal deaths and morbidity, as well as the incidence of malnutrition, morbidity, and deaths in children age 5 and younger. In addition, we work with communities to reduce the incidence of HIV and AIDS in newborns, children, and young people, as well as provide care and treatment to children and families already affected by HIV and AIDS.

### Children's participation as active citizens

We enable children and young people—especially girls and young women—to organize and express themselves as active citizens. We also promote and develop enabling environments for children's participation in the decision-making of families, governance institutions, and civil society organizations.



### Adequate standards of living

Many families lack the minimal income gained through their labor or ownership of productive assets, and consequently are unable to provide their children with adequate standards of living. Poor households that lack sufficient resources to meet basic needs put children at risk. To counter these risks, Plan works to ensure that children and young people have access to sufficient and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. We also promote access to formal financial services (savings, credits, insurance, and remittance) for women, as well as prepare young men and women for formal employment or self-employment through market-oriented vocational, business, and life-skills training.

### Access to drinking water and a clean environment

Safe, reliable, and affordable potable water supplies and improved environmental sanitation services are critical to children's health and well-being. We work with families to dispose of waste safely by helping them to adopt improved hygiene practices. We also recognize the need for all girls and boys to have appropriate water and environmental sanitation services in their schools.

### Resilience during emergencies

To reduce the impact of disasters on children, Plan works with communities to prepare for disasters and mitigate the impact of climate change. We also advocate for increased child-centered humanitarian assistance in the case of direct disaster relief/rehabilitation interventions.

### Economic Security

The poorest 45 percent of the population of India own just 9 percent of the land. Daily farm labor is common but pays subsistence-level wages. Migration to the cities is common among many farmers who have given up trying to coax a living out of their land. Women and children are left to till the land. Village artisans generally work at home on their cottage industry.

### Family Structure

In India, the family has traditionally been the core of daily life. Family bonds are all-important, and the presence of relatives is essential and inevitable in good and bad times. Families in rural areas are usually joined through generations: married sons will take their wives to the paternal home.