Unlike other parts of Punjab, the Bist Doab has been recording a slow population growth during recent decades due to continuing out-migration. The decade 1951-61 witnessed an intensification of the process of out-migration and emigration in response to increasing pressure of population on farm resources in the context of the region's high density, accelerating rate of natural growth of population, predominantly agricultural economy and slow pace of industrialization. The availability of newly reclaimed agricultural land in other parts of Punjab and adjoining states provided a stimulus to the land-hungry peasants to move out. Emigration also received special spurt during this decade. In this region of traditional emigration the native people had long contacts in other countries and they had become aware of the benefits which accrue from moving to affluent areas of the world. Out of the nearly 0.44 million persons who moved out of the Bist Doab during 1951-61, over twenty-two thousand emigrated to other countries, particularly the United Kingdom.

The immediate effect of such a large scale outflow of population was a slow growth of both rural and urban population. Such has been the ubiquity of
out-migration, that nearly 75 per cent of the villages and almost an equal proportion of the towns in the Bist Doab recorded a growth rate much less than the rate of natural increase. Urban growth was particularly sluggish in the dissected foothill plain where economy continues to be backward. By contrast, urban places along the Grand Trunk road recorded rapid growth stimulated by expansion of existing industries and emergence of new ones.

Since economic migration in India is largely male-selective, sex ratio of the Bist Doab increased from 864 in 1951 to 885 in 1961. Increase in sex ratio of rural population from 875 to 907 was more marked as 85 per cent of the out-migration took place from rural tracts. The increase in sex ratio was more pronounced in areas which experienced out-migration for non-agricultural activities than in those from where out-migration was for agricultural purposes. However, in spite of a significant increase in its sex ratio, the Bist Doab continues to suffer from a large deficiency of females due to an unusually low sex ratio at birth and a higher rate of mortality among females than males.
It is remarkable that despite considerable out-migration of educated persons, literacy rate recorded an increase from 16.0 per cent in 1951 to 29.9 per cent in 1961. The basic factors associated with this development have been the opening of a large number of new schools by the government (under the first two Five Year Plans) as also by various religious and social organizations (some of which receive funds from emigrants and out-migrants), and growing awareness of the need of education, particularly in rural areas. Education has been specially popular with the peasants who, in view of declining size of land holdings, realized the need of educating their children so that some of them could find employment in non-agricultural jobs. Nevertheless, there still remains a great disparity in literacy rates of rural and urban areas. Equally wide is the differential in literacy by sex. Literacy rates are deplorably low among the scheduled castes despite special effort of the government to spread literacy among this economically and socially backward population group. Above all, areal variations in literacy are of greatest interest. While the central zone of the region is its most literate part, the marginal areas are characterized by low and static literacy rates. The wide disparity in the literacy conditions of the two areas is related to the great difference in their degree of urban development, proportion of non-agricultural population and spacing of educational institutions.
As a result of out-migration and emigration from among the agricultural families, the proportion of non-agricultural workers has risen. Nevertheless, there was also some shift of agricultural population to non-agricultural activities. The main factors responsible for this shift have been growth of new industries at big urban places, such as Jullundur, Phagwara and Nangal, increasing rural-urban contact through development of road transport, and prevailing surplus of workers in agriculture. A side effect of this development was an acceleration in the process of rural-urban commuting as a result of which occupational structure of rural tracts adjoining the urban places experienced the greatest change.

Thus, the salient features of the demographic life of the Bist Doab during 1951-61 have been: sizeable out-migration and emigration; slow growth of rural as well as urban population; increase in sex ratio; rapid growth of literacy; and increase in the proportion of non-agricultural workers. The demographic character of various parts of the region, however, changed at differing rates. Broadly speaking, the central zone of the Bist Doab presents a marked contrast to the peripheral floodplains of the Beas and the Sutlej and the hilly zone. While the former has been dynamic, especially with regard to changes in occupational structure, rural-urban commuting and growth
of literacy and education, the latter have remained largely stagnant with continuing overdependence on agriculture, meagre urban development and relatively low literacy rates. However, with recent successes in planned socio-economic development, these regional inequalities have started narrowing down. If these trends continue in future, the intra-Doab variations in demographic characteristics will reduce further.