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2019 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

SEX IMBALANCES AT BIRTH IN VIETNAM: TRENDS AND VARIATIONS

This factsheet presents key highlights of recent trends in imbalances of sex ratios at birth, based on an analysis of data from the 2019 Population and Housing Census. It presents SRB differentials per geographical location and population group, and includes population forecasts based on different SRB scenarios. And it is concluded with policy recommendations.

In the past 15 years, an increase in the sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been observed in certain countries in the world including Eastern Europe and Asia including Viet Nam. The SRB is calculated as the number of boys born alive per 100 girls born alive, and the “natural” or normal sex ratio at birth in most parts of the world is between 105 and 106 male births for every 100 female births. Any deviations from this natural sex ratio at birth can reflect the presence of gender-biased sex selection (GBSS).

It is generally considered that the SRB imbalance can be driven by three key factors: (1) **Son preference**, which makes it desirable; (2) **Smaller family norm and fertility decline**, which makes it necessary; and (3) **New technologies**, which make it possible.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Levels and trends

- According to the 2019 Census, the SRB in Viet Nam is 111.5 male births per 100 female births, showing a very high level of sex imbalance at birth. The highest SRB which has been currently recorded in the world stands at 114.6 in Azerbaijan, whereas China's SRB is now close to Viet Nam's at 111.9. Viet Nam's SRB is the third highest in Asia, following China and India.

Table 1: SRB in selected countries, most recent estimates

Country	SRB ^a	Period	Source
Albania	108.0	2018	Birth registration
Armenia	111.1	2018	Birth registration
Azerbaijan	114.6	2018	Birth registration
China	111.9	2017	National Bureau of Statistics
Georgia	107.9	2018	Birth registration
India	111.6	2015–2017	Sample Registration System
Kosovo	109.0	2018	Birth registration
Nepal	110.6	2012–2016	Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2016
Taiwan, Province of China	107.0	2018	Birth registration
Viet Nam	111.5	2018–2019	2019 census

^aSRB is expressed in male births per 100 female births.

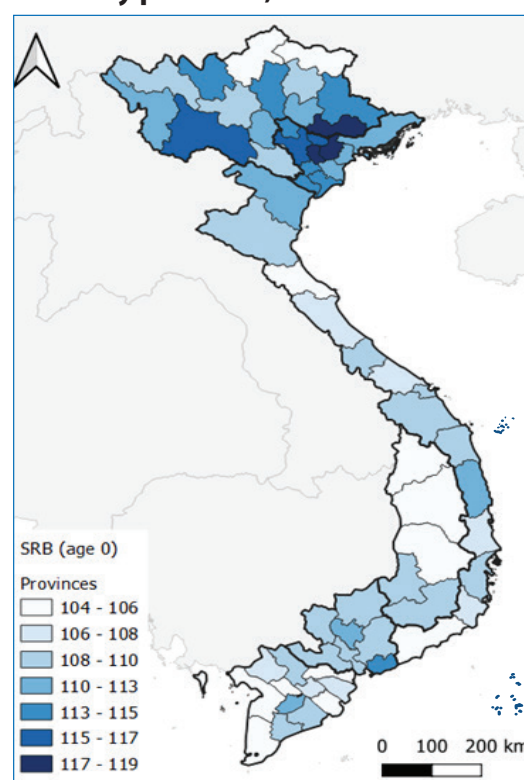
Sources: National Statistical Offices and DHS.

- When compared with normal SRB, the current situation in Viet Nam points to a yearly deficit of 45,900 female births in 2019, and there is a strong evidence to suggest the presence of Gender-Biased Sex Selection (GBSS). The missing female births represents 6.2 per cent of the observed female births.
- A comparison of the current SRB figure with those in the previous 15 years can indicate that the Viet Nam's SRB might have plateaued. The SRB started increasing in Viet Nam in around 2004, and it may have peaked at the level of 112 in 2010. Sex imbalances at birth have however spread across the country, reaching not only urban but also rural areas. In recent years, there have been small annual fluctuations around 111–112.

2. SRB Differentials per geographic area and population group

- Considerable SRB variations can be observed across the country, pointing to the diversity of gender and family systems in Viet Nam. **Figure 1** describes SRB differentials by geographical area, and further disaggregation by rural and urban areas, are displayed in **Figure 2**. The SRB is higher in rural areas of the Red River Delta at 115.2 while it is 112.8 in urban areas.¹ Higher-than-average SRBs are also visible in the Northern Midlands and Mountains regions. In contrast, the SRB is lower in the South, most notably in the Mekong River Delta or in the rural parts of the Central Highlands.
- SRB variations can also be seen per socio-economic status of the household. The higher SRBs are more evident among wealthier households. For instance, the SRB is at 108.2 among the poorest quintile, in comparison with 112.9 among the richest one. However, it should be noted that when analysed with data from the previous census,

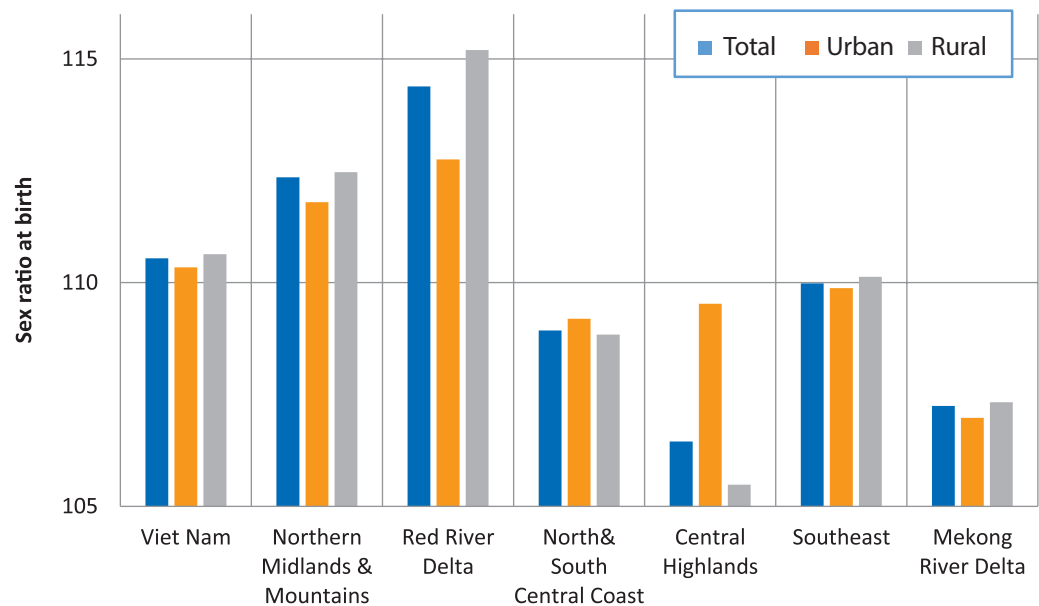
Figure 1: SRB, in 2018–2019, by province, 2019 census



1. Estimates for regions and provinces are derived from the sex ratio of the population below 1 and may therefore vary from other estimates based on the recent births.

it is clear that the SRB has risen among the poorest groups over the past 10 years – the only groups with such an increase. In addition, SRBs are higher among those with higher educational levels and socioeconomic status, and among specific ethnic groups.

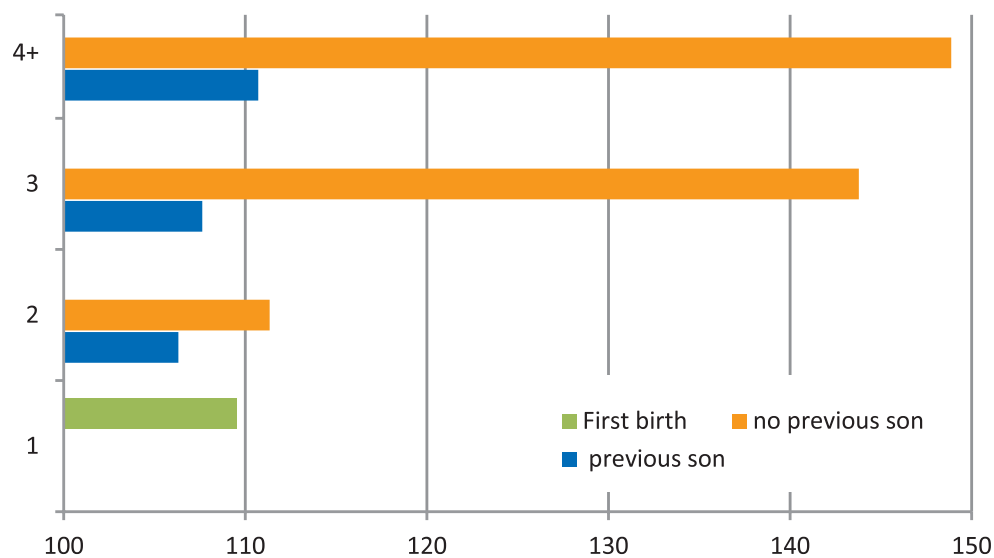
Figure 2. SRB by region and rural and urban areas in Viet Nam, 2018 - 2019



3. SRB differentials per parity - son preference

- A higher SRB is shown already among the first births (at 110), but the SRB rises further with subsequent births (see **Figure 3**). In addition, SRBs are higher among families without previous sons, reaching the level of above 140 after the successive birth of two or more girls (parity 3 or 4+). It even reaches 180 when computed on the population of Northern regions or among the wealthiest quintile.
- The sex ratio of the last birth (SRLB) illustrates the variations in the intensity of son preference, ranging from 109 to 219 among last births in the country. In the two northern regions, the SRLB is even above 204 boys for 100 girls, while it is much less (at 125) in the south.

Figure 3: SRB by birth order and previous gender composition in Viet Nam, 2014–2019

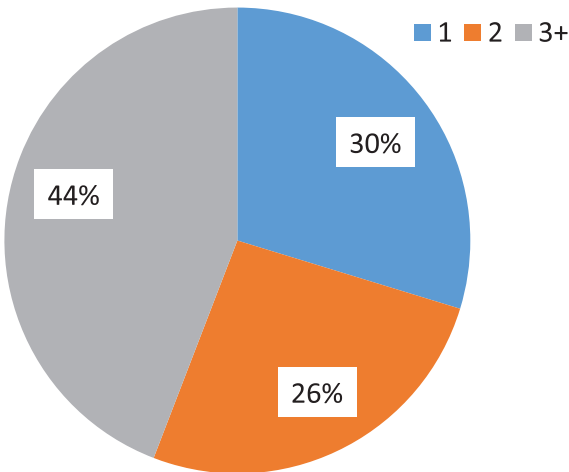




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- Among parents who already have two children but who do not have a boy, the probability of having another child reaches 48 per cent after 10 years. In contrast, it is only 22 per cent among parents with two sons or 23 per cent for those with mixed-gender compositions. Sonless parents are thus twice as likely to have an additional child. The need for a son is especially strong in the northern regions and among more affluent or educated populations.
- The skewed SRB of the first births accounts for no less than 30 per cent of all missing female births in Viet Nam (see **Figure 4**), which is a proportion greater than elsewhere.

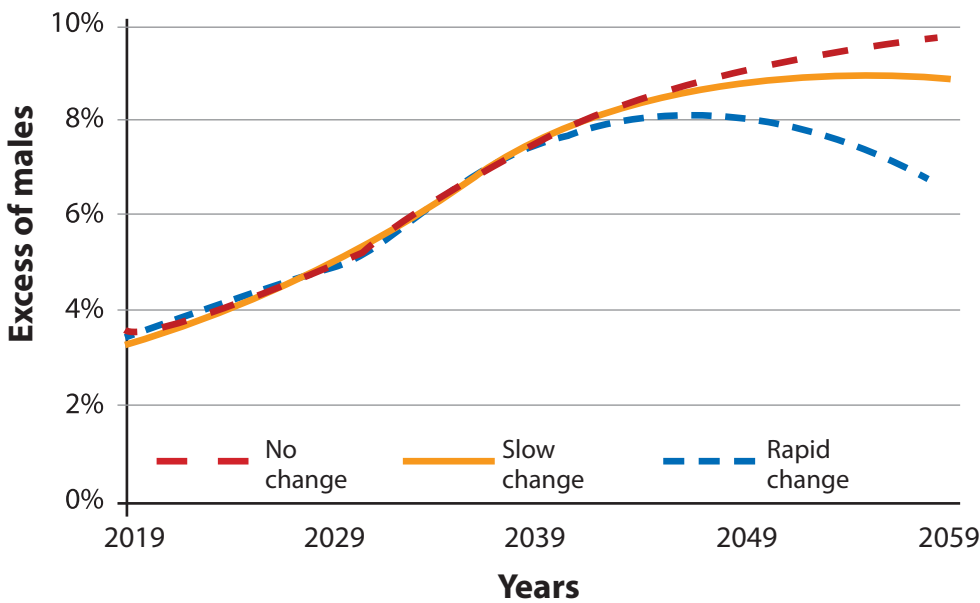
Figure 4. Distribution of missing female births by parity, 2014–2019



4. SRB and population forecasts

- The SRB imbalances in Viet Nam will have a long-lasting impact on the country’s population structures. Excess male births will be gradually translated into excess boys and excess male adults, if the proportion of male births does not decline in the future. Population forecasts show that the imbalance among the adult population is unlikely to improve in the next decades, as most of the future adult population has already been born. **Figure 5** shows the percentage of excess males aged 20–39 years computed according to future SRB changes. With SRB staying permanently at 111, a surplus of young men will even increase from 3.5 per cent in the 2019 to almost 10 per cent in 2059. Even if the SRB were to decrease rapidly within the next 10 years, the excess young male adults would still rise for up to 8 per cent and decline only after 2049.
- Among adults aged 15–49 years, the excess of males will rise to 1.5 million by 2034 and may further increase to almost 2.5 million by 2059 (9.5 per cent of the corresponding male population) if the SRB level does not decline. In the best scenario of SRB, the surplus of males is likely to remain above 1.8 million by 2059.

Figure 5. Percentage of excess males aged 20–39 years according to different SRB scenarios, 2019–2059 projections



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on international experience and literature, the following policy recommendations are suggested:

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