

VIET NAM

COUNTRY PROFILE

Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls: Improving the sex ratio at birth in select countries in Asia and the Caucasus

Hanoi 2019



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ABBREVIATIONS

DHS	Demographic Health Survey
GSO	General Statistics Office
HDI	Human Development Index
IPS	Inter-censal Population and Housing Survey
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
PCSA	Parliamentary Committee for Social Affairs
GBSS	Gender-biased sex selection
SRB	Sex ratio at birth
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VFF	Vietnamese Fatherland Front

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Viet Nam has made good progress on its gender equality targets under Millennium Development Goal 3 and has integrated the Sustainable Development Goals in national policy by approving in May 2017 the National Action Plan for their implementation as a guidance framework for Viet Nam by 2030. The legal framework for gender equality and women's empowerment has become stronger. However, the manifestations of gender inequality such as violence against women and girls, child marriage and gender-biased sex selection remain.

The sex ratio at birth in Viet Nam has increased rapidly since 2004 to a high level of 112.1 boys for every 100 girls born in 2017. Gender-biased sex selection has been identified as the major cause of the sex ratio at birth imbalance in Viet Nam. The primary factor driving such behavior among many couples is son preference deeply rooted in the traditional culture of Confucianism and patriarchal family systems, and the social norms of valuing boys more than girls in general.¹⁰

While son preference has a long history in Viet Nam, the recent availability and accessibility of technology for selecting the sex of the fetus, gender-biased sex identification and induced abortion explain the fast rise in the sex ratio at birth imbalance in Viet Nam since 2005.

The third factor relating to gender-biased sex selection is the country's low fertility rate, declining from 2.6 children per woman in 1999 to 2.04 in 2017. As the number of children declines, and many couples want to have at least one son, they may practice sex selection in favor of boys from the first birth. The sex ratio at birth is thus already high at the first birth in Viet Nam (110.2).⁸

Sex ratio at birth levels vary among the geographical regions. The sex ratio at birth is very high in the provinces in the Red River Delta, exceeding 125 boys per 100 girls in three provinces in this region. At the same time, the ratio is close to the biologically normal level of 102 to 106 males per 100 females in three other regions (Northern Midlands/Mountains, Central Highland and Mekong Delta).

If Viet Nam's imbalanced sex ratio at birth continues in the coming years, gender inequality will be further increased due to more pressure for women to marry at a younger age, rising demand for sex work, and the expansion of trafficking networks that will increase the risks of gender-based violence.

The Government of Viet Nam has recognized the issue of the imbalance in the sex ratio at birth and, with support from the UNFPA country office, has taken efforts to address the issue through policies and legislation, aiming to return the sex ratio at birth to the biologically normal level by 2025. To achieve this ambitious target, several areas of intervention need to be taken into account, including better-targeted and more effective communication that can change social norms and practices that discriminate against women and girls, better law enforcement without limiting women's ability to exercise their reproductive rights, reliable and timely monitoring, and data for tracking the dynamics of change in sex ratio at birth and the impacts of interventions.

BACKGROUND

VIET NAM AT A GLANCE

Population: 93.70 million (2017)¹

GDP: \$US2,389 per capita (2017). GDP growth is 6.2 per cent for 2016 and 6.81 per cent for 2017.²

Life expectancy: 73.5 years; for women 76.2 and for men 70.9 (2017)

Fertility rate: 2.04 children per woman (2017)³

Human Development Index: 116 out of 189 countries – medium human development category

Gender index ranking for Viet Nam⁴

- Gender Inequality Index: 67 out of 160 countries
- Gender Gap Index: 69 out of 144 countries

Women's representation in the National Assembly (2016-2021 term): 26.7 per cent

Labour participation rate (aged 15 and older): Women = 73.2 per cent; Men = 83.5 per cent

Labour market: Male wage worker = 40 per cent of male workforce ; Female wage worker = 29.1 per cent of female workforce⁵.

Viet Nam is a low middle-income country with a population of more than 90 million, and has a market-based economy with a socialist orientation. According to the recent joint assessment of the World Bank and the Vietnamese Government, over the past 30 years, Viet Nam has achieved impressive social and economic development, advancing its regional and global integration process through various trade agreements. Economic growth has been stable and the poverty rate has dropped dramatically, from 50 per cent in the 1990s to 3 per cent in 2015. There have been considerable improvements in the health and education sectors. The country has achieved a number of the Millennium Development Goals and is active in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals in national policies.

Despite these social and economic achievements, Viet Nam is facing new challenges in the development process: relatively lower-than-expected average income; low productivity; macroeconomic instability; new forms of poverty and vulnerabilities; increased inequality, especially the inequality in access to opportunities for development; and weak governance in key sectors. Viet Nam needs to adapt and embrace opportunities and challenges to avoid the “middle income trap” of having achieved a certain income and getting stuck at that level, and also not to lag behind other economies in the region.⁶

Study methodology and limitations

Viet Nam has no published birth registration data; therefore, the sex ratio at birth can only be monitored by use of decennial censuses and sample surveys.

Census data on sex ratio at birth is from 2009, which is when the last round of the national Population and Housing census was conducted, implemented by the General Statistics Office of the Ministry of Planning and Investment. The Census has a sample size of 15 per cent of the population and provides the most comprehensive information on the sex ratio at birth situation in Viet Nam. The Census is conducted once every 10 years; the next one will be conducted in 2019.

For the first time, in 2014, an Inter-Censal Population and Housing Survey (IPS) was implemented in between the Population and Housing Census by the General Statistics Office. The 2014 survey provided more updated demographic information including that of sex ratio at birth.

In addition, the General Statistics Office conducts an Annual Survey on Population Change and Family Planning. Along with a lack of regular monitoring, there is a lack of qualitative data for better understanding son preference among different population groups, and data on the relationship between son preference intensity and gender-biased sex selection practice. Demographic and Health Surveys record people's preferences for ideal number of sons and daughters, but this only reflects opinions and attitudes instead of actual behaviors regarding son preference and gender-biased sex selection. Information on the magnitude of the impact of sex ratio at birth imbalance is also missing, such as information about the linkages between skewed sex ratio at birth and cross-border marriage, or between sex ratio at birth imbalance and gender-based violence.

CHAPTER

1

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