

## ETHNIC GROUPS IN VIET NAM: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2009 CENSUS

This fact sheet presents key highlights of the current situation, trends and characteristics of the larger ethnic groups, based on the most recent population and housing census (2009). It also summarizes a selection of policy implications and includes recommendations for appropriate strategies and programmes to reduce disparity, vulnerability and improve the quality of life for people of ethnic origin.

### ISSUES

Viet Nam is known as a country with a great diversity of ethnic groups. The Kinh ethnic group accounts for the largest proportion, with approximately 86 per cent of the population while another 53 ethnic groups make up the remaining 14 per cent. The importance of equity among ethnic groups is recognized in the 1992 Constitution of Viet Nam and is reflected in many areas of policy and programming dialogue. However, despite a favorable policy environment, ethnic minorities often remain vulnerable and disadvantaged when compared to the Kinh majority with poor living conditions and difficulties in gaining access to health care services as well as educational and vocational training opportunities.

Analysis of a selection of key indicators from the 2009 Census has shown a number of gaps between ethnic groups in Viet Nam. To ensure reliability and representativeness, indicators on age and sex patterns were analyzed for the ten ethnic groups with the largest population (size: 400,000+). Other indicators were analyzed for six ethnic groups that consist of one million people and higher namely Kinh, Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, and Hmong ethnic groups.

### MAIN FINDINGS

#### **1. Changes are occurring in the age structure within ethnic groups, and as a result, the largest ethnic groups have entered a period of 'demographic bonus' and are ageing more rapidly**

Among the ten largest groups, eight are at different stages of the 'ageing' process although none of them are yet experiencing an 'aged' population.

The Kinh and Hoa groups have an 'ageing index'<sup>1</sup> of 38.5 per cent and 44.9 per cent respectively (Figure 1) which are higher than the national level of 35.5 per cent. In six out of the ten groups with the largest population size – Hoa, Tay, Kinh, Muong, Khmer are entering the period of 'demographic bonus' where there are more than two people of working age (15-64 years old) for every one person of non-working age.

#### FACTS AND FIGURES

- The 10 largest ethnic groups in Viet Nam are Kinh, Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Hoa, Nung, Hmong, Dao, and Gia Rai, where the four largest groups include Kinh accounting for 85.73%, Tay 1.89%, Thai 1.81%, and Muong 1.48%.
- Six large ethnic groups - Hoa, Tay, Kinh, Muong, Khmer, and Nung - have entered a 'demographic bonus' period which poses both opportunities and challenges for the groups.
- The Hmong people have the highest TFR (4.96%), highest IMR (4.6%), lowest average life expectancy at birth (64.3 years), and lowest literacy rate (37.7%).
- Gender disparity exists among ethnic groups with regard to education. The literacy rate of Hmong and Thai women are around 26% and 20% respectively, lower than their male counterparts.
- The Khmer people have the poorest housing conditions, and the Hmong people have the worst living conditions.

<sup>1</sup> According to UN-DESA (2005), ageing index is calculated as the number of persons from 60 years old or over per hundred persons under age 15.

## 2. Early marriage is observed among some of the largest ethnic groups

One indicator used to analyze marital patterns of a certain population cohorts is the Singulate Mean Age at first Marriage (SMAM). The SMAM can be utilized to demonstrate variations across different ethnicities. While the SMAM of Tay, Thai, and Muong ranges from 22.8 years to 25 years for males and 20.8 years to 22.2 years for females, those of Kinh are 26.6 years for males and 23.1 years for females. The lowest SMAM is found among the Hmong people with 19.9 for males and 18.8 for females. This reflects the fact that marrying at an early age is very common for the Hmong people and a cultural norm within other ethnic minorities as well. Creating educational and vocational training opportunities for ethnic women, as well as access to decent jobs, will help to reduce early marriage.

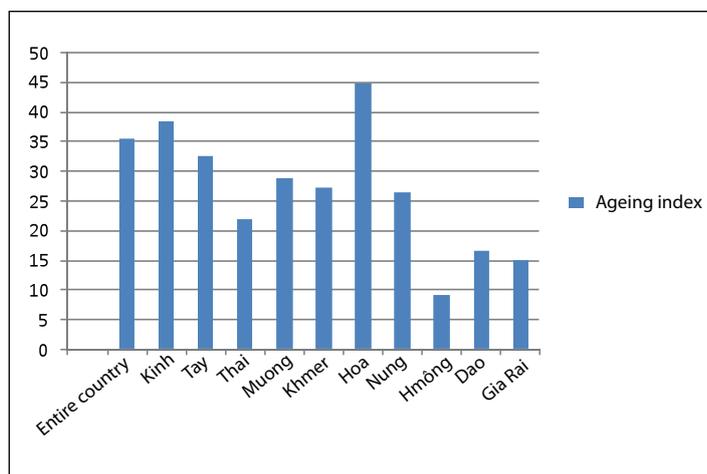


Figure 1: Ageing index by ethnic groups, 2009

## 3. Fertility is declining across most ethnic groups, while disparity is observed for infant and under-five mortality

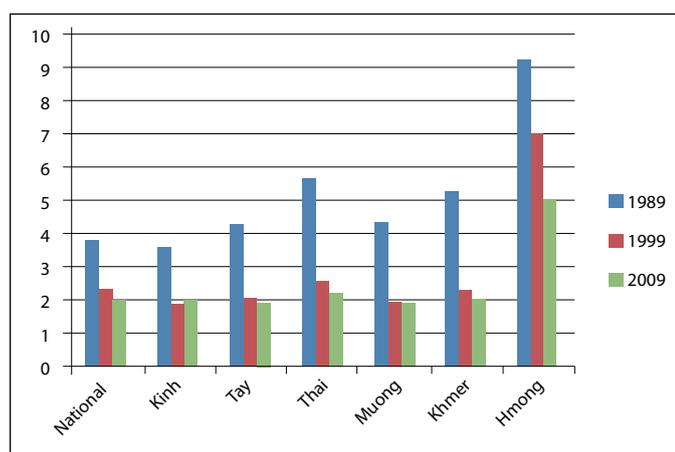


Figure 2: TFR by ethnic groups in 1989, 1999 and 2009

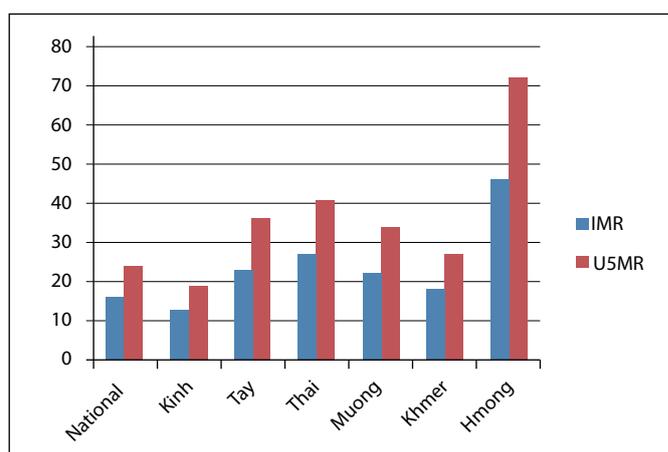


Figure 3: IMR and U5MR by ethnic groups, 2009

Figure 2 indicates a declining trend in fertility for almost all ethnic groups over the past 20 years with the most notable decline in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR)<sup>2</sup> of the Hmong. In 1999, a Hmong woman was estimated to deliver nine children in her lifetime while in 2009, this figure had dropped to five per woman. Still, this rate remains very high compared to the small family norm of the national average with a TFR of two children per woman. Extra effort will thus be required to ensure universal access to reproductive health services for this population group who are often living in the mountainous and isolated areas.

The 2009 census data on infant mortality and the average life expectancy indicate significant differentials between ethnic minority groups and the national average. Except Kinh, the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) of ethnic groups are higher than that of the average national levels. Notably, IMR and U5MR of the Hmong people are as high as 46/1,000 and 72/1,000 live births respectively, which are nearly three times higher than the national averages (Figure 3).

As could be expected, due to the higher mortality rates observed, the average life expectancy of the Hmong people is the lowest with only 64.3 years in comparison with 72.8 for the national average. In order to reduce

<sup>2</sup> According to the Report "World Population Ageing 2009" published in 2010 by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, the total fertility rate is the average number of children a woman would bear over the course of her lifetime if current age-specific fertility rates remained constant throughout her childbearing years (normally between the ages of 15 and 49). The current total fertility rate is an indicator of the level of fertility at a given time.

disparity in mortality between ethnic groups, continued efforts must be made to address the root causes of poverty, and to ensure universal access to education and social protection such as nutrition, maternal, and child health services, for these populations.

#### 4. There are considerable gaps in education levels, as well as professional and technical qualifications among ethnic groups and between males and females

The data show striking disparities among ethnic groups and between males and females in education and training. The literacy rate is lowest among the Hmong people with 37.7 per cent. The literacy rates are higher among males than females in the six largest ethnic groups but this differential is most obvious in the Hmong (nearly 26 percentage points), Thai (20 percentage points), and Khmer (11 percentage points). The “never attended” rates of population aged 5+ among several ethnic groups (Khmer and Hmong) are very high, 21.4 per cent and 47.8 per cent respectively. As can be seen, these rates are higher for females than males (Figure 4). This fact suggests that women belong to a disadvantaged category within their own population, and females from ethnic minorities have faced many unfavorable conditions in accessing the education system.

Although the net enrollment rates in primary school are consistent and relatively high for ethnic groups (more than 80%), the differences in the enrollment rate by ethnic groups are more apparent at higher educational levels. The higher the educational level, the greater the differences that can be seen between the Kinh and other ethnic groups.

There is an obvious difference between the Kinh people and the remaining ethnic groups with regard to qualification levels. The Kinh majority have a much higher rate of qualification than others (Figure 5), it can be clearly determined that improving the technical qualification levels of ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam remains a big challenge.

#### 5. Most ethnic minorities face enormous disadvantages in living conditions

Ethnic minorities are facing insecure and unhygienic living conditions. Among the six largest ethnic groups, the Khmer and Hmong people have the worst housing conditions. Only 37% of the Khmer and 46% of Hmong are living in permanent or semi-permanent houses. With the exception of the Kinh, the proportion of ethnic groups using hygienic toilet facilities is very low (below 30%). The Hmong have the lowest population using clean water sources (13%) and hygienic toilet (3%) as compared with other ethnic groups.

In general, except Kinh, ethnic groups must cope with lower socioeconomic conditions; especially most Hmong people (96%) are living in households with socio-economic conditions classified as ‘poorest’.

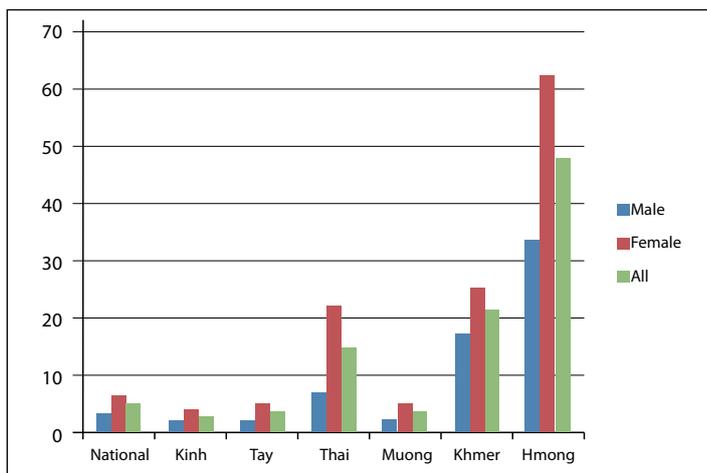


Figure 4: Never attended school rate of the population aged 5 years and older by ethnic groups, 2009

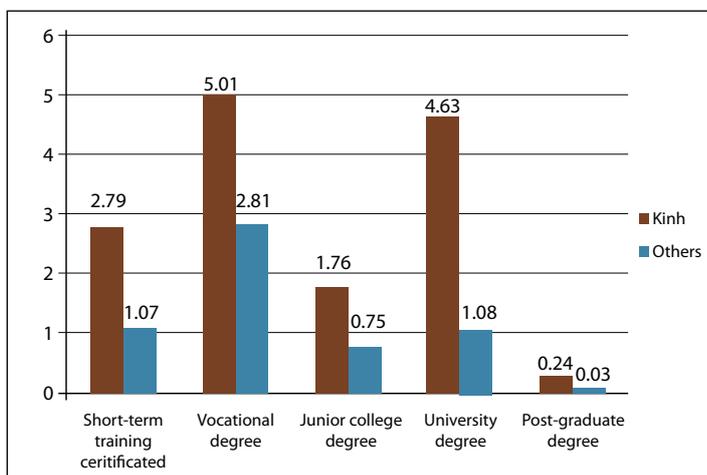


Figure 5: Prevalence of graduation from technical levels, 2009

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The changes in age structure as well as the gap in educational and technical qualification/ levels between ethnic groups suggest that ethnic minority people (and especially women) of working age should be provided with better access to education and vocational training. This investment will address a number of root causes of poverty, and narrow the gap in development between the Kinh and other ethnic minorities as well as among ethnic groups living in remote and mountainous areas.

- Early marriage is very popular among some ethnic groups, especially Hmong people. Therefore, creating opportunities for women to raise their levels of education will help to reduce early marriage for women of ethnic minority groups, improve their qualifications and technical skills, and increase their access to decent jobs.
- Fertility and mortality rates have declined among ethnic groups throughout the country over the last 20 years, however the high level of IMR and U5MR among ethnic minority groups in mountainous regions requires further expansion of access to culturally sensitive sexual and reproductive health services<sup>3</sup>, especially maternal and child health services, and prioritizing resource allocation to remote, disadvantaged areas.
- There is a need to undertake more in-depth studies and analyses on education among ethnic groups to better understand what hinders access to schooling, and prevents ethnic groups from pursuing higher education. Evidence from this research should further guide overall education and vocational training policy and programmes.

## REFERENCES

- UNFPA. (2011). Ethnic groups in Viet Nam: Key findings from the 2009 Viet Nam Population and Housing Census. United Nations Population Fund in Viet Nam.
- UNFPA. (2010). Policies on reproductive health care for ethnic people in Viet Nam. United Nations Population in Viet Nam.

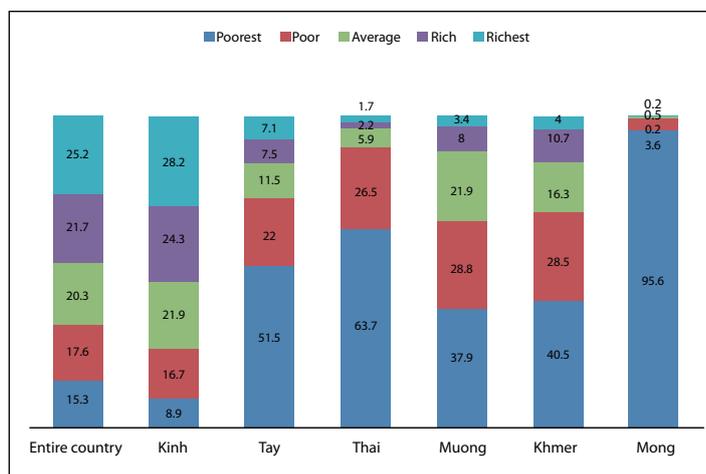


Figure 6: Percentage distribution of ethnic population based on socio-economic conditions, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Viet Nam Population and Reproductive Health Strategy 2011-2020