

## VIETNAM'S POPULATION AGING AND THE NECESSITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW POPULATION POLICY IN THE YEARS AFTER 2020

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**Abstract.** Population aging is a long-term process, which depends on factors affecting fertility as well as other socio-economic factors including population policy. Many of our country's population and family planning policies have been implemented for a long time and significant results have been achieved: The total fertility rate (TFR) reached the replacement fertility level in the 2010s; Our country's population has entered the golden population period, and after this period comes population decline. An analysis of the World Bank's data on population growth and the annual TFR of our country and a few countries in the aged population period shows that the tendency toward a birth decline in Vietnam is still continuing. Therefore, the risk of population decline will be apparent in the coming years. Population policy is very important in increasing or decreasing the population of each nation. The population policy that aims at the birth decline in our country is not suitable anymore. Therefore, it is necessary to change the population policy in order to maintain the population at a stable increasing rate (TFR at 2.1; natural population growth at 0). Actively controlling the birth rate will positively affect the country's socio-economic development.

**Keywords:** Golden population period, population aging, new population policy.

### 1. Introduction

Many studies on the population aging process have been recently mentioned in national and international research and documents of the Party and the Government. Vietnam is among the top 10 countries with the fastest aging rate in the world [1, 2]. It is concerned that while it took countries in the world many decades, even centuries, to transform from an aging population to an aged population (for example, France: 115 years, Sweden: 85 years, the United States: 70 years, etc), Vietnam is forecasted to reach an aged population in the next 16-18 years. Based on the population policy orientation of the Party and the government, there should be comprehensive solutions, in which planning population policy to adapt to population aging should focus on such elements as financial security, health and disability, social care, and life organization with considerable attention to the elderly who are alone, suffering from abuse and violence as well as being in emergency situations [2]. In another study, Dang Thi Anh Tuyet and Nguyen Trung Hieu [3] mentioned that an aged population in the future will increase the socio-economic burden. If Vietnam has no timely adaptive policy solutions, it will encounter many crises in terms of the labor market, social protection for the elderly as well as the provision of basic social services in the context of an aged population. The population work over the past time has achieved many important results and the population quality has been improved. Many documents have been promulgated in order to improve the quality of the population to meet the requirements of

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sustainable development [4]. Nguyen Duc Vinh [5] presented the “Second demographic transition theory” developed by demographers in recent decades, in which fertility below replacement level is believed to be the result of cultural changes towards postmodern values and norms, towards more individual freedom and autonomy in choosing the model of marriage and family, etc. This way can suggest a new approach to population research and fertility prediction in Vietnam.

Applying the one-child policy since 1982, China recognized the effects of the policy on the population and economy. Therefore, The Central Document, State Council (China) [6, 7] clearly states that population development has an important influence on the country's prosperity. In order to grasp the spirit of the Central Party conference(s) and promote the long-term balanced development of the population, [the government] will apply the policy of reproductive optimization, implement the three-child policy, remove restrictive mechanisms (regarding having children), and abolish sanctions. Simultaneously, China has applied comprehensive measures to encourage reproduction (referred to as the implementation of the “three-child” policy and comprehensive measures). China has the largest population in the world and is a developing country with the fastest population aging rate. Population aging has become one of the biggest threats to China's future [8].

The population is aging at a fast rate in our country. There should be new policies in order to ensure Vietnam's stable population development.

## **2. Content**

Vietnam's population is reaching 100 million people soon (99,988,067 people on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2023) [9], ranking 15<sup>th</sup> among the most populous countries in the world, 8<sup>th</sup> in Asia, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in Southeast Asia (behind Indonesia and the Philippines) out of a total of 204 countries and territories (Table 1). Vietnam is in the group of countries with high population density. Over the past 60 years, Vietnam's population has increased more than 3 times (32.67 million people in 1960, 67.98 million people in 1990, and an estimated 100 million in 2023) [9]. In the 1970s, and 1980s, Vietnam was one of fast population growth countries. However, the population growth rate has been slowing down in the 1990s and became stable with a population growth rate of less than 1%. The low natural population growth rate indicates that Vietnam will become a country with an aged population and be at risk of population decline in the near future.

***Table 1. Population of Vietnam and ASEAN countries (Thousand people)***

<b>Country Name</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Indonesia	88383	214072	244016	259092	261850	264499	267067	269583	271858	273753
Philippines	28487	77958	94637	103031	104875	106739	108569	110381	112191	113880
Vietnam	32718	79001	87411	92191	93127	94033	94914	95777	96649	97468
Thailand	26597	63067	68270	70294	70607	70898	71128	71308	71476	71601
Myanmar	21721	45538	49391	51484	51892	52288	52666	53040	53423	53798
Malaysia	7834	22945	28718	31069	31526	31976	32399	32804	33200	33574
Cambodia	5542	12119	14364	15418	15625	15831	16025	16208	16397	16589
Lao PDR	2123	5431	6323	6787	6891	6998	7105	7212	7319	7425
Singapore	1646	4028	5077	5535	5607	5612	5639	5704	5686	5454
Timor-Leste	469	878	1088	1206	1225	1243	1262	1280	1300	1321
Brunei Darussalam	85	334	396	421	426	430	434	438	442	445

Within 60 years (from 1960 to 2020), Vietnam's total fertility rate (per woman) decreased by 3.2 times (From 6.28 children/woman in 1960 to 1.96 children/woman of reproductive age in 2020). Perseveringly implementing the fertility reduction policy, Vietnam reached the replacement fertility level at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has now reached below the replacement fertility level. If Vietnam continues to maintain or decrease the total fertility rate, it will also enter a period of stability and then a period of population decline in the next 10 to 20 years - this is a warning for the population policy "Each family has only one or two children," which has been being implemented over the past decades and is still being maintained.

According to the statistics in Table 2, Vietnam's total fertility rate was lower than the world average in 2000 and is currently ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in Southeast Asia, but still higher than Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, and Malaysia. With a total fertility rate of below 2, Vietnam will enter the initial period of population decline although this period will only begin in the next few decades. The declining fertility trend of the Vietnamese population was recorded since 2010 by a number of studies [10, 11]. An adjustment of population policy to be suitable for economic and societal development and also to avoid the aged population is necessary.

**Table 2. Total fertility rate (per woman) of ASEAN countries**

Country Name	1960	1980	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
World	4.70	3.73	2.72	2.55	2.48	2.48	2.46	2.40	2.36	2.30	2.27
Singapore	5.76	1.82	1.60	1.15	1.24	1.20	1.16	1.14	1.14	1.10	1.12
Thailand	6.25	3.36	1.61	1.58	1.47	1.44	1.41	1.38	1.35	1.34	1.33
Brunei Darussalam	6.84	4.07	2.35	1.94	1.95	1.92	1.88	1.85	1.82	1.80	1.78
Malaysia	6.41	4.06	2.91	2.14	2.04	1.98	1.93	1.88	1.83	1.82	1.80
Vietnam	6.28	4.86	2.07	1.90	1.95	1.94	1.93	1.94	1.95	1.96	1.94
Myanmar	5.98	4.83	2.79	2.35	2.25	2.25	2.23	2.21	2.20	2.17	2.15
Indonesia	5.55	4.49	2.54	2.45	2.35	2.31	2.26	2.23	2.22	2.19	2.18
Cambodia	6.25	5.77	3.77	2.77	2.55	2.51	2.47	2.44	2.40	2.38	2.34
Lao PDR	6.29	6.33	4.40	3.15	2.77	2.72	2.67	2.62	2.57	2.54	2.50
Philippines	7.15	5.11	3.71	3.26	2.95	2.89	2.87	2.83	2.81	2.78	2.75
Timor-Leste	6.32	5.22	5.98	4.85	3.90	3.74	3.60	3.45	3.34	3.25	3.15

*Data from the database: World Development Indicators; Last Updated: 05/10/2023.*

Similar to the decrease in fertility per woman of childbearing age, the natural population growth in Vietnam decreased from 2.72% in 1961 to 0.84% in 2021 (Table 3). The decline is faster than the world average (1.35% and 0.86%, respectively); therefore, while the annual population growth was twice the world average in 1961, it has been lower than the world average since 2000 (1.12% compared to 1.35%). This fact reflects the impact of our country's population policy on each citizen's reproductive behavior, which has led to a rapid fertility decrease in recent years.

In our analysis (in order to remove the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the population growth rate), we used the 2018 data for comparison: Vietnam has a lower annual population growth rate than the world average (Table 3). However, it is still nearly two times higher than China; nearly three times higher than Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Myanmar, and lower than the remaining ASEAN countries. The population growth rate comparison among

different countries help Vietnam effectively taking it into account the national population policy-making process.

**Table 3. Annual population growth rate (%) in ASEAN countries and some other countries**

Country Name	1961	1980	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
World	1.35	1.75	1.35	1.22	1.19	1.18	1.15	1.10	1.06	1.01	0.86
Russian Federation	1.11	0.71	-0.42	0.04	0.19	0.17	0.11	-0.01	-0.05	-0.23	-0.43
China	-1.02	1.25	0.79	0.48	0.58	0.57	0.61	0.47	0.35	0.24	0.09
United States	1.66	0.96	1.11	0.83	0.74	0.72	0.63	0.53	0.46	0.96	0.12
Singapore	3.34	1.27	1.73	1.77	1.19	1.30	0.09	0.47	1.14	-0.31	-4.17
Thailand	2.98	2.16	0.99	0.67	0.48	0.44	0.41	0.32	0.25	0.24	0.18
Indonesia	2.72	2.38	1.45	1.25	1.11	1.06	1.01	0.97	0.94	0.84	0.69
Myanmar	2.20	1.94	1.10	0.76	0.80	0.79	0.76	0.72	0.71	0.72	0.70
Brunei Darussalam	4.82	3.23	2.08	1.46	1.14	1.08	1.00	0.92	0.87	0.84	0.82
Vietnam	2.72	2.17	1.12	1.07	1.04	1.01	0.97	0.93	0.90	0.91	0.84
Malaysia	3.03	2.61	2.54	1.76	1.50	1.46	1.42	1.32	1.24	1.20	1.12
Cambodia	2.19	2.40	1.83	1.46	1.35	1.33	1.31	1.22	1.13	1.16	1.17
Lao PDR	2.26	1.95	1.69	1.49	1.42	1.52	1.53	1.52	1.50	1.48	1.43
Philippines	2.96	2.65	2.22	1.80	1.67	1.77	1.76	1.70	1.66	1.63	1.49
Timor-Leste	1.53	1.20	1.34	2.13	1.76	1.54	1.51	1.49	1.46	1.52	1.60

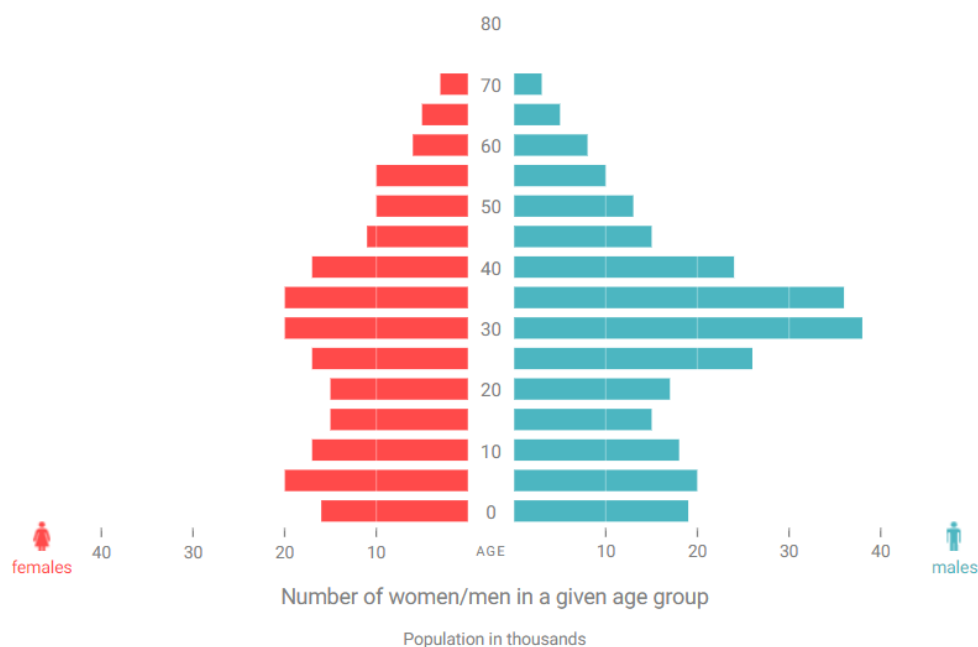
*Data from the database: World Development Indicators; Last Updated: 05/10/2023*

A comparison of localities in the country shows that, in 2018, the whole country had 30 provinces with lower and 33 provinces with a higher annual population growth rate than that of the Nation [13]. The occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic impacted Vietnam's annual population growth. After nearly two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2021, there were 34 provinces and cities with a higher annual population growth rate than the national average (9.3‰) - Bac Ninh had the highest rate (17.95‰ - nearly twice the national average), while Vinh Long had the lowest rate (2.01‰). According to statistics, there was no steady increase or decrease in the annual population growth among the provinces in the country, which proves that the propaganda and implementation of the population policy in our country during the above-mentioned period in each locality did not achieve the desired results in all localities: Fertility behavior was adjusted in accordance with the decreasing trend; however, no "fast and slowly decreasing groups" were established. Between the two special urban areas, Hanoi City and Ho Chi Minh City, the annual population growth in Hanoi City is higher than in Ho Chi Minh City; Most of Hanoi's natural population growth rates between 2005 and 2021 were higher than the national average. Ben Tre is a province that has the lowest annual natural population growth for many years [14].

Lessons from China indicate that with the one-child policy, China's population growth rate has been continuously decreasing over the past 50 years and is currently at only 0.09% per year. Realizing the risk of population decline in the future, the Chinese government has replaced the one-child policy with a new one: remove restrictive mechanisms (regarding having children), abolish sanctions regulations, and apply comprehensive measures to encourage reproduction [6].

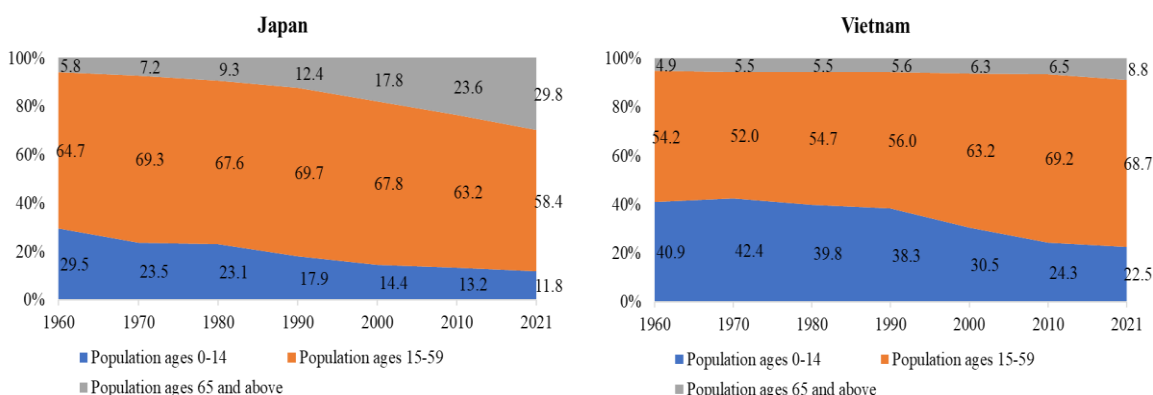
The reproductive behavior of an ethnic group or a country cannot be changed overnight. Changes in reproductive behavior often take one or several generations as the factors affecting

population growth are of socio-economic nature (income and employment, education level, social security, etc.). Vietnam's total fertility rate takes more than half a century to be like today. However, it is considered rapid in comparison to that of the world [15].



**Figure 1. Vietnam's population pyramid 2023 (Source: UNFPA Viet Nam)**

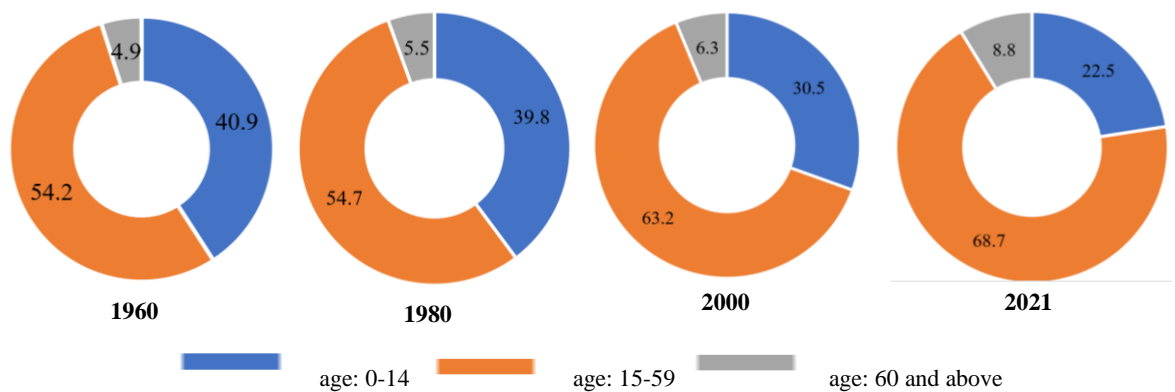
Vietnam's population aging process started many years ago (Table 1, 2, 3; Figure 1). The proportion of the population aged 30 and below is already smaller than that of the contiguous age group (the 40-year-old age group – people born in the 80s of the last century). Despite the slow decline of the total fertility rate per woman, Vietnam's population pyramid will soon turn into a cylindrical shape – an indication of an aged population - in the next few decades.



**Figure 2. Population structure by age group Japan and Vietnam (1960-2021)**

Figure 2 shows that Vietnam's current population structure is similar to that of Japan in the 1970s. This indicates that Vietnam's population aging rate is currently equivalent to that of Japan in the 70s of the last century.

The age structure of Vietnam today is similar to that of Japan in the years 1960-2010 period (Figure 2, 3). It can be inferred that Vietnam needs  $\pm 30$  years in order to achieve the same population structure as Japan today.



**Figure 3. Vietnam's population by age group in 1960, 1980, 2000 and 2021**

If Vietnam does not have policies to change reproductive behavior in the next 30 years, it will have the same population structure as Japan in the 80s and 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. China has made fundamental changes in its population policy. One of the changes is that instead of birth restriction, China has started a policy to encourage fertility (the three-child policy) to limit the process of population decline and the population burden of an aged population country [6, 7].

In order to remove the burden of an aged population, which affects Vietnam's socio-economic development, we should quickly apply a new population policy at least aiming to maintain a country with a stable population, with a total fertility rate of no less than 2.1 to 2.15.

### 3. Conclusion

Compared to several countries that are in the final stage of population aging and Southeast-Asian countries that have a low population growth rate, Vietnam's population is in the middle stage of population aging. Population aging has a great impact on the population size, quality, and consequently, on the socio-economic development of a country. The population aging process in Vietnam has resulted from the birth reduction policy strictly implemented since the last quarter of the previous century. Although the process of fertility rate reduction and population aging in Vietnam are not uniform across localities, their common feature is that they are taking place vigorously, changing the population structure and labor source and thus indirectly affecting the socio-economic development of the country. The population policy on reducing the fertility rate is no longer appropriate to Vietnam as we are facing an aged population in the coming decades. New population policy is needed in order to maintain the sustainable development of the country. So, aiming to get a population with the TFR from 2.1 to 2.15 should be the target of population policies.

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