

DEMOGRAPHY

Birth rate plummets, Vietnam scraps two-child policy

WORLD

25_06_2025

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Communist Vietnam has ended its decades-long two-child policy in hopes to mitigate its declining birth rates. On June 3, the Vietnamese National Assembly **passed** a new amendment allowing couples to determine the number, timing, and intervals between

the births of their children, according to state and international media reports. The birth rate among Vietnamese families falling to 1.91 children per woman in 2024, as per state media, is particularly true among cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, where there are higher living expenses. Notably, 2024 was the **third consecutive year** Vietnam's fertility rate fell below the replacement level.

The two-child policy restriction was mooted in 1988, when the total fertility rate exceeded four births per woman. Members of the Vietnamese Communist Party who breached the two-child policy restriction could **face penalties** like dismissals, warnings, or reduced bonuses.

In view of dropping birth rates, Vietnam's Health Ministry suggested changing the law in 2024 to enable each couple and single parent to decide the number of children to have and the spacing between births. "Vietnam is in the period of population ageing," the UN Population Fund **declared**. Moreover, the UN **added** that Vietnam's population ageing process was "progressing rapidly", and that the transition from an "ageing" to an "aged" population would happen just within two decades.

Furthermore, Vietnam's Ministry of Health singled out gender-selective births as one of the reasons for the country's gender imbalance. For instance, the imbalance of male to female births rose from 103 boys per 100 girls in 2006 to 111 boys per 100 girls in 2024.

To deal with such a situation, the ministry has suggested increasing the fine from 30 million to 100 million Vietnamese dong to penalize **gender-selective practices**, *Fox News reported*. This is because while doctors are forbidden to reveal a baby's sex to parents before birth, and sex-selective abortions are prohibited, some still try to allude to a baby's sex using coded language, **as per** state media *VN Express*, citing a government report.

Nonetheless, despite policy amendments, some worry that measures still remain inadequate to persuade Vietnamese couples to have more children. For example, Deputy Health Minister Nguyen Thi Lien Huong **cautioned** that it was an uphill task to convince families to have more children, quoting uncertainties about socio-economic development, including labour shortages and population ageing, for the long haul.

According to government estimates, Vietnam's population could start declining by 2054 if present trends continue, with potential yearly declines reaching 200,000 people by the late 2060s. Strikingly, the country's "golden population" period—when working-age people exceed the number of dependents—is expected to last till 2039.

A report by Star Tribute stated: "The number of people who can work is likely to peak in 2042 and, by 2054, the population may start shrinking. All of this could make it harder to grow the economy, since there will be fewer workers while the cost of supporting the needs of the elderly increases. Birth rates in Vietnam aren't falling evenly. In Ho Chi Minh City — the country's biggest city and economic hub — the fertility rate in 2024 was just 1.39 children per woman, much lower than the national average. At the same time, nearly 12% of the city's population was over 60, putting pressure on welfare services. To help, local officials started offering about \$120 to women who have two children before turning 35 last December. It also offers some of the most generous family benefits in the region, including six months of fully paid maternity leave and free healthcare for children under 6. Tuition in government schools is free until the age of 15 and, starting in September, it'll be free till the end of high school."