



FACT SHEET MALAYSIA

Rural Women in the Malaysian Economy



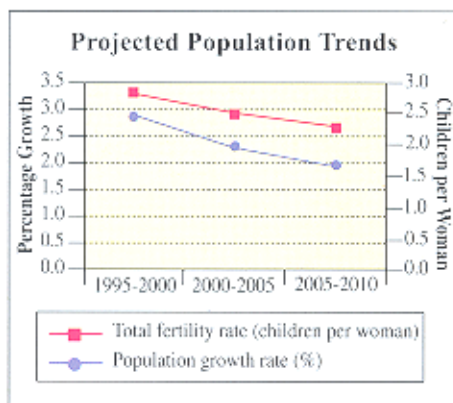
KEY FACTS

- ◆ The population of Malaysia is 49 percent female
- ◆ The population growth rate will reach 1.66 percent by 2005
- ◆ 59 percent of the population lives in urban areas
- ◆ The total incidence of poverty is 7.5 percent, but it is 12.4 percent in rural areas
- ◆ Female participation in education is higher than that of males and female participation increases in the tertiary level
- ◆ 83 percent of women are literate
- ◆ Women are 30 percent of the labour force but 41 percent of the employees in manufacturing
- ◆ Migration of rural men to urban centres has given women greater responsibility for rural production
- ◆ Rural women workers have been displaced by mechanisation and must learn new skills
- ◆ More than half of women agricultural labourers work in fruit and vegetable crops
- ◆ Use of pesticides is a health threat to women who work in field crops

GENERAL PROFILE

Population

Malaysia, with a land area of 336 745 km², consists of Peninsular Malaysia and of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo (Chee and Peng). Malaysia's population of 23 001 000 is projected to reach 31 580 000 by 2020, although the rate of population growth is declining from 2.44 percent in 1995 to a projected 1.66 in 2005. Likewise, the fertility rate that was 3.26 children per woman in 1995 is falling to a projected 2.62 in 2005. Women are 49 percent of the population. Malaysia's population is young; 32 percent is under 15 years of age, 64 percent is of working age (15-64 years) and 4 percent is 65 years or older. Life expectancy for women is 77 years and for men, 72 years (UNESA). The projected population growth rate and the total fertility rate are shown in the following table.

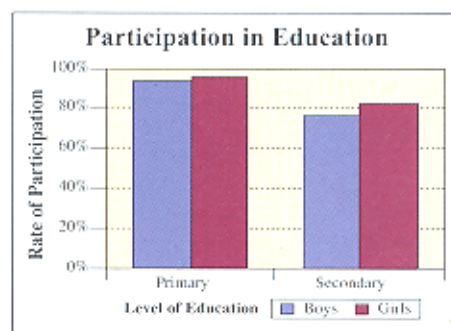


Source: UNESA

As recently as 1990, the Malaysian population was mainly rural, but movement to urban areas has been rapid. By 2002, 59 percent of the population lived in urban areas. Projections anticipate that 74 percent of the population will be urban by 2020. Rapid urbanisation has resulted in uneven development. The total incidence of poverty for Malaysia is 7.5 percent (UNESA). The poverty rate in rural areas is 12.4 percent, while the rate in urban areas is 2.4 percent (Masud and Paim).

Education

Malaysia's constitution guarantees the right of education to all, and the government provides 11 years of free, non-compulsory basic education. The educational system consists of six primary years, two lower secondary years and three upper secondary years. There are no restrictions on girl's participation in the educational system. Girls' participation rate is slightly higher than that of boys at the primary level and the difference widens at the secondary level where 95.6 percent of girls attend compared to 83.3 percent of boys. Fewer girls drop out compared to boys at both the primary and secondary levels.



Source: UNESCO

Women's participation in tertiary education varies from 30 percent of enrolment at polytechnics, to 66 percent at teacher training colleges and 54 percent at public institutions of higher learning. In the public institutions of higher learning, women dominate in arts (61 percent), science (58 percent) and law (65 percent). In engineering, however, women are 24 percent of enrolment, and they are 26 percent in the technical stream (Malaysia: EFA, 2001).

As a consequence of women's increased participation in education, the adult literacy rate for women rose from 74 percent in 1990 to 83 in 2000 (UNICEF). Government programmes to incorporate functional literacy curricula into socio-economic programmes for rural populations address some of the educational needs of rural women. Adult education programmes include