

Population characteristics



With population characteristics and processes both the drivers and results of social and economic development processes and outcomes, it is imperative that a good understanding of a country's population dynamics provide the basis for informed decision-making, policy development and planning.

Population and housing censuses provide the backbone of this information in most countries. But these 'snapshots' are taken only every five to ten years and so are not enough to inform policy and allow regular monitoring of development progress.

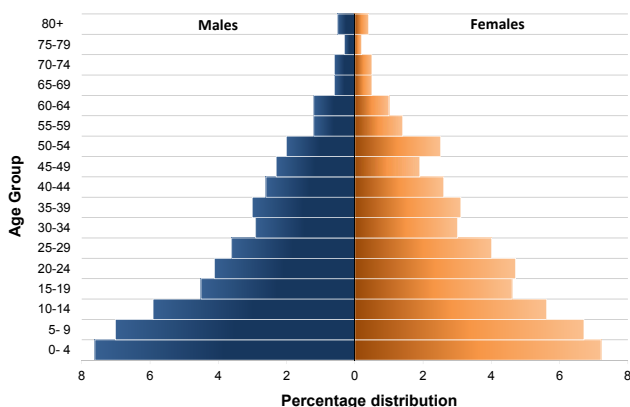
Regular household surveys, such as the 2013 Vanuatu DHS, address this data and information gap by providing high quality, up-to-date statistics and information in their own right, as well as providing the basis for the calculation of important development indicators. This survey provided more than a hundred such indicators, covering many development features of relevance to both national and international development agencies and conventions such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to name but a few that are included in this development snapshot.

The population of Vanuatu

A census is held in Vanuatu every ten years; the most recent Census was in 2009.

Vanuatu has a youthful population with about 40% of the population surveyed younger than 15 years of age (Fig. 1). The youthful population is a result of a continued high fertility rate, which also reflects a high population growth rate of 2.5% per year.

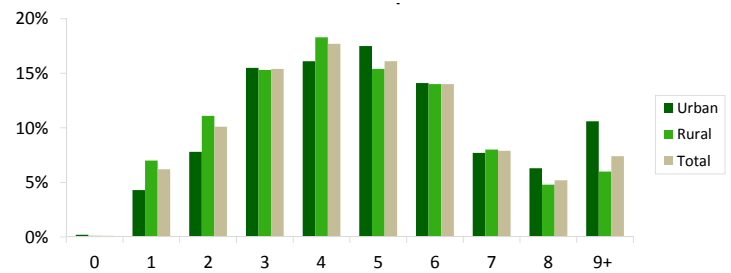
Figure 1: Percentage distribution of de facto household population by age and sex



Household composition

The average household size comprises of about five members (4.9) (Fig. 2) which corresponds to the figure shown by the 2009 population and housing census; 6% of households are headed by women. In urban areas, some 11% of households have nine or more members compared to 6% for rural households.

Figure 2: Household composition – number of usual members



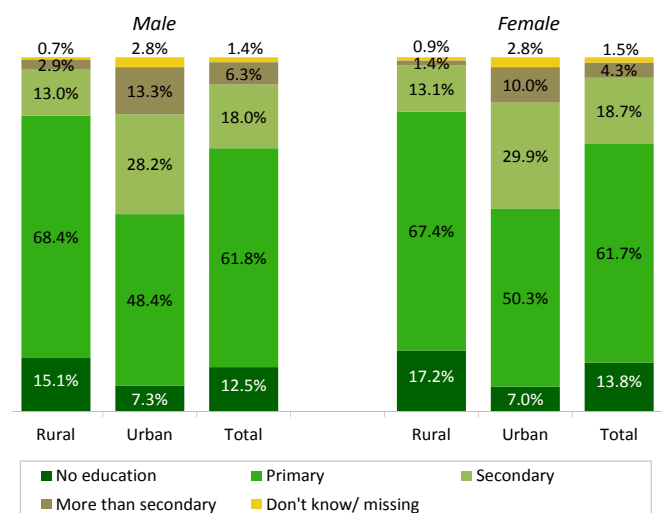
As elsewhere throughout the Pacific, fosterhood is common in Vanuatu, with equal proportions of rural (26%) and urban households (26%) including foster and/or orphaned children. Seventeen per cent of children aged less than 18 years of age do not live with a biological parent.

The 2013 Vanuatu DHS provides useful information concerning socio-economic background characteristics, which may provide important contextual information for key demographic and health outcomes. These include education (such as attainment levels), economic well-being (illustrated through wealth quintiles) and basic household amenities, such as access to safe water, sanitation and household characteristics, such as household size. All of these factors are of critical importance, especially to infants and young children.

Educational level

Education is provided free in Vanuatu for primary education in government schools for children aged 6–13 years, and some schools allow enrolment from five years of age (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Educational achievement of males and females in Vanuatu - Highest educational attainment



Most people in Vanuatu do not progress past primary education, with 13.8% of females and 12.5% of males never having attended school; the latter is more pronounced in rural than urban areas. Furthermore, of those referring to primary education as their highest level of educational attainment, only 24.5% of men and 24.1% of women actually completed primary



school. Urban Vanuatu also has a much higher concentration of women (39.9%) and men (41.5%) with secondary education or higher, compared to rural areas (15.9% of males; 14.5% of females). Overall, there appear no major differences between the educational achievement of males and females in Vanuatu.

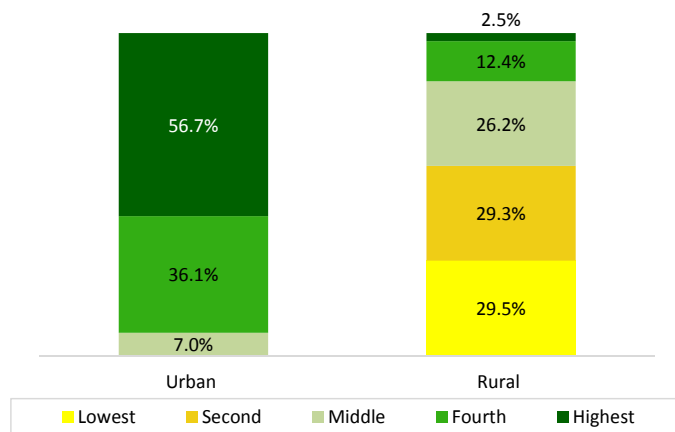
Net attendance ratio (NAR) measures the number of school-age children who attend school. According to the 2013 Vanuatu DHS, the primary school NAR is 77%, while the secondary school NAR is only 24%.

Economic well-being

DHS Household information on assets allows the calculation of a wealth index, which provides a useful proxy measure describing the long-term standard of living of a household. It is not an absolute measure that can tell us if a household suffers hardships or lives in poverty. What it can tell us, however, is that a person living in a household in the second highest wealth quintile, for example, has a better socio-economic status than someone in a lower quintile, and a worse socio-economic status than someone in the highest wealth quintile.

Wealth is distributed very unevenly throughout the country, with wealth concentrated largely in urban areas. About 57% of the urban population are in the highest wealth quintile compared to just under 3% of the rural population. In contrast, 30% of rural households are in the lowest wealth quintile compared to none in urban areas (Fig.4).

Figure 4: Wealth quintiles



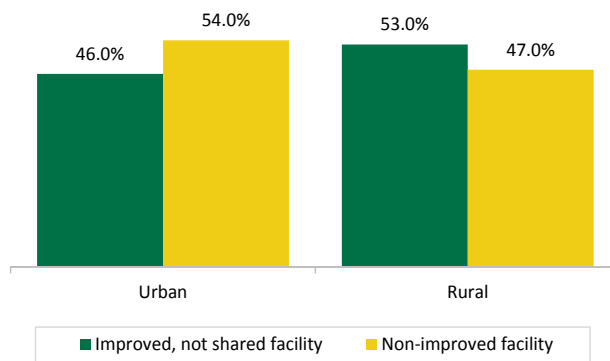
Access to safe water and sanitation

Poor sanitation, coupled with unsafe water sources, can increase the risk of waterborne diseases and illnesses due to poor hygiene. Households without proper toilet facilities are more exposed to the risk of diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea, and typhoid fever than those with improved sanitation facilities.

Just under half (46%) of urban households have access to improved (and not shared) sanitation facilities, with the majority having to make do with non-improved facilities (shared facilities, flush or pour but not sewers/septic tanks/pit latrines, pit latrines without slab, no facility/bush). The picture is almost reversed in

rural households, where access to improved sanitation facilities is much higher than in urban Vanuatu. This is because a major proportion of rural households (46%) has access to improved pit latrines (ventilated, and/or with slab) compared to only 7% in urban Vanuatu. The fact that 54% of urban households have access only to non-improved sanitation facility has some serious personal and environmental health implications, particularly in crowded urban environments (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Household sanitation facilities



Access to safe drinking water

Overall, 91% of households have access to an improved source of drinking water. Urban households have greater access to piped water sources (99%) than rural households (88%).

Access to electricity

Around 32% of Vanuatu households have access to electricity; 86% in urban and 14% in rural Vanuatu.

Policy note

The broad base population referred to earlier is indicative of continued high fertility in Vanuatu, which translates into high population growth. A youthful population means continued and growing pressure on the government to provide education and employment opportunities, which will be outside the formal sector for most.

With many health outcomes determined by factors outside the health sector, and related to people's social and economic environment, their housing, and access to services and infrastructure (e.g. water and sanitation), it is worth remembering when comparing demographic and health patterns across the country, that 57% of the population in urban areas are in the top wealth quintile, compared to only 3% in rural Vanuatu; three out of every ten rural ni-Vanuatu people are represented in the lowest wealth quintile, compared to zero in the two urban centres.

While there appear to be no major differences between the educational achievement of males and females in Vanuatu, it is worth noting that while three out of every four men and women do not progress beyond primary education as their highest level of educational achievement, 50% of males and 51% of females have had none or incompleting primary education.

*For more detailed information on population characteristics see chapters 2 and 3 in the 2013 Vanuatu DHS report.