

Paper 2

Population Ageing in Vietnam – An Irreversible Truth ?

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Abstract

Will Vietnam grow old before it becomes rich? Very few developing countries that have reached middle-income status have gone on to become fully developed nations. The rapidly changing context of Vietnamese society is putting the multi-generational household under increasing pressure from forces of both demography and modernisation. There are now 8 million elderly (60+) people (10% of population), but that figure will jump to 36 million (30%) by 2050.

A sustained investigation of qualitative and ethnographic means in the north and north-central provinces of Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ha Tinh and Vinh focused on health, household living arrangements, and finances. It revealed family structures have largely been maintained, the inter-generational contract remaining strong, despite changing economic and social paradigms over the last two decades. The elderly are not simply dependents in their households or those in which they reside, in fact they are still contributing to households in various ways such as child-care, household chores and pooling of income. This is an important factor for healthy active ageing with a crucial contribution also being made by the elderly in living productive lives in society and economy. There is also a huge and growing disparity between the elderly living in urban and rural areas. There are local government structures (UBND / VAE) throughout the entire country which could in future years be effective in raising elderly out of poverty or providing social care if reformed pro-actively.

PANEL VIII: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

This paper discusses one of the most pressing contemporary challenges in transitional Vietnam, with valuable insights for Southeast Asia where many countries are facing the unprecedented approach of accelerated population ageing. Vietnam is one of Southeast Asia's fastest-growing economies and has its sights on becoming a developed nation by 2020.