

# Maldives' Population Dynamics: Policy Prospects for Human Growth and Opportunity

John F. May, Ph.D.

[jmay@prb.org](mailto:jmay@prb.org)

Population Reference Bureau Washington, DC





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## Foreword

**A**s an island nation the Maldives faces unique challenges in the years ahead, from social and economic ones to mitigating the effects of climate change. But it also stands at the cusp of greater economic growth and development.

The 2014 national Population and Housing Census provided a helpful snapshot of Maldivian society and in particular the dynamic make-up of the Maldives population, which will help drive the agenda needed for developing future policies to further long-term development planning. The Census highlighted the important challenge the Maldives faces in terms of building opportunities for young people, improving reproductive health outcomes, improving gender equality and addressing migration issues. It also examined the potential for the Maldives to capture the country's first demographic dividend, seizing the possibilities of economic growth which could result, if the country's younger generation are provided with further higher education opportunities needed to get secure good jobs and better income.

The Maldives has proven to be a resilient nation, and has come a long way in its economic and social development, but more can be done to seize the economic opportunities the country could benefit from in the years ahead.

The UNFPA is working closely with the government of the Republic of the Maldives on its development path. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Maldivian Government, the National Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury as well as Professor John F. May for their contribution to this report and their continued cooperation.

This report offers suggested technical input, providing a policy roadmap for the Maldives in moving forward. It sheds light on the patterns and trends which the Census revealed. And I hope it spurs a national dialogue on population and development issues which results in a new national development plan that helps to prioritize investment in Maldives' younger generation and demographic dividend as well as focusing on gender equality and managing migration.

We will stand with the Maldives to help it develop this path forward to build a better future for its next generation.

Mr. Alain Sibenaler  
UNFPA Country Director, Maldives



## Foreword

**I**n 2014 Maldives conducted its 29th Population and Housing Census, after a break of 8 years. This national undertaking was achieved with the support of a number of government agencies as well as by effective participation of the private sector. We value their commitments and contributions towards making the 2014 Census a success. In particular, we acknowledge the support and participation of the general public in the Census. I wish to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to His Excellency President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom for his support in conducting the 2014 Census.

The preliminary results of the Census were released on 4 November 2014 and the final results were published in the first *Statistical Release on Population and Households* on 20 October 2015, to coincide with the commemoration of the World Statistics Day. Subsequent Statistical Releases on Migration, Education, Employment, Fertility and Housing and Household Characteristics were published on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics. Following the release of Census results, we have embarked on the analytical phase of this venture in which we hope to utilize the Census data to highlight emerging socio-economic concerns and issues to promote evidence based policy formulation and decision making. This report entitled "*Maldives' Population Dynamics: Policy Prospects for Human Growth and Opportunity*" provides a general perspective on the results of the 2014 Census. The analytical work and the preparation of the report were undertaken by the National Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with UNFPA. Analytical findings of this report highlight a range of issues providing essential policy recommendations for policymakers and international agencies.

Population and development themes was first addressed by the government in the 2004 Population Policy of Maldives. Since then successive governments have adopted policies addressing population and developmental concerns. A renewed focus on population and development nexus has been brought to the national agenda by President Yameen. The cornerstone of the government's population policy is population and development consolidation; particularly the development of Hulhumale' as an urban center of the Maldives that could consolidate up to 70% of the population there. The empowerment of youth and women are also central themes of President Yameen's development platform. As the 2014 Census shows 35% of the resident population of Maldives are youth, and Maldives is ripe for a demographic dividend. As such the government strives to capture this

window of opportunity for the nation, by galvanizing the latent productivity of our youth, by facilitating opportunities for skills development and higher education, promoting youth entrepreneurship through programs such as the MVR 200 million GETSET program, and the creation of 94,000 employment opportunities for youth. As the 2014 Census shows significant disparities still remain in labour force participation and employment between the sexes. The government policies place great emphasis on female empowerment through programs to enhance female engagement in the economic activities such as promoting female entrepreneurship, facilitating flexible work arrangement for pregnant women and working mothers, and ensuring an equitable division of marital property in divorce. The 2014 Census and this analysis provides a timely update on the population dynamics of the Maldives that would aid in further refining and enhancing the population and development policies that has been embarked by President Yameen.

I extend my utmost appreciation to Professor John F. May for his invaluable time and effort put into getting this analysis completed. I am also grateful to UNFPA for taking the initiative and for providing the financial support to complete this exercise. Finally, I extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the staff of National Bureau of Statistics for their dedication and successful completion of this report, which is definitely a significant milestone in building our knowledge on socio-economic situations of the Maldives.



Ahmed Munawar  
Minister of Finance and Treasury





## Acronyms

APC	Atoll Population Committee
CBR	Crude Birth Rate
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CPR	Contraceptive Prevalence Rate
DD	Demographic Dividend
DemDiv	Demographic Dividend model
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DNP	Department of National Planning
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GBV	Gender Base Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income
GP	General Practitioner
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MDP	Maldivian Democratic Party
MFT	Ministry of Finance & Treasury
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MNH	Maternal and Newborn Health
MPND	Ministry of Planning and National Development
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NCD	Non-communicable Disease
NDP	National Development Plan
NTA	National Transfer Accounts
PDC	Population and Development Consolidation
PHE	Population, Health, and Environment
PoA	Programme of Action
PPCC	Population Programme Coordination Committee
PPCU	Population Programme Coordination Unit
PPM	Progressive Party of Maldives
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PSA	Population Situation Analysis
RH	Reproductive Health
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEP	Strategic Economic Plan
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UN	United Nations
UNCPD	UN Commission on Population and Development
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

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## Executive Summary

The Maldives has experienced rapid economic and social change in the past 30 years.

First, its economy has grown impressively, driven to a large extent by a vibrant tourism industry, with support from fisheries and the service sector.

At the same time, the Maldives has almost completed its demographic transition – the shift from high crude birth and death rates to low ones. The country's total fertility rate has declined from 6.4 children per woman in 1990 to 2.5 in 2014, according to Census estimates. As a result, the country's age and sex structure has changed dramatically.

Today, the working-age population (15 to 64 years old) outnumbered young dependents (those under 15 years old) by a 2 to 1 margin. This means the country has entered a demographic window of opportunity and could be poised to capture the benefits of a first demographic dividend.

Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census confirm this. The 2014 Census adopted a strict *de facto* approach, meaning that all people residing in the country were enumerated.

The 2014 Census counted 402,071 residents in September 2014, of which 63,637 were foreigners – about 16% of the Maldives' total resident population. Although the inclusion of foreigners contributed to a substantial increase in the total population over previous years, administrative records indicate that foreigners were significantly undercounted (Republic of Maldives 2015b: 6). This highlights the issue of immigration to Maldives.

Youth also emerge as a significant demographic force in the 2014 Census: 47.5% of all resident Maldivians are less than 25 years old.

The government of Maldives last addressed population and development issues in its 2004 Population Policy of the Maldives, as well as in its National Development Plans (NDPs). However, both are now in disuse.

The 2007 *Seventh National Development Plan (2006-2010)*, also known as the *Strategic Action Plan 2009-2013*, was the last NDP to be issued in Maldives. The Seventh NDP discussed in particular the population and development consolidation policy, whereby the government elicits voluntary migration in order to regroup scattered populations in larger, and presumably more economically viable, communities with the view towards providing better job opportunities, as well as saving costs on infrastructure and service delivery (namely, education, health, and energy). The government had also adopted sectoral policies, including a *Health Master Plan* (a new one is being prepared), two youth strategies, and several reproductive health policies. Moreover, the Government has designed a *National Gender Policy 2016-2021*.

These various policies need a broader framework for organizing how the Maldives can take advantage of the new demographic trends. The country needs to prioritize three main issues, as follows:

- Improving youth's human capital and reproductive health outcomes (including gender equitable policies);



The overall ambition is to start a new conversation on population and development issues in Maldives

- Capturing the first demographic dividend; and
- Managing internal and international migration.

It is also necessary to examine the linkages and cross-cutting issues among these three areas, including mitigation of climate change's effects.

The "3E Framework" (empower, educate, employ) proposed by the World Economic Forum should also help reap the synergies across these development priorities.

To address the three priority issues — youth's human capital and gender equality, first demographic dividend, and migration — that Maldives must prioritize to take advantage of current demographic trends, this report proposes four policy pathways:

- Bring population issues within overall development strategies in Maldives;
- Strengthen the institutional settings to address population issues;
- Expand population and development research; and
- Enhance advocacy on population and development issues.

## Why this Paper?

Let's briefly review the rationale for undertaking this report, the methodology adopted, and the outline of the paper.

## Report's Rationale

Results of the 2014 Census provide a new basis to review population and other macro-policies in Maldives.

This examination of population dynamics and their policy implications for the Maldives is a product of the long-standing partnership between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ministry of Finance and Treasury's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) to support census analysis and enhance data-driven policy and decision-making.

Based essentially on salient findings from the 2014 Census, this analysis attempts to inform policy discussions and provide decision makers with context and policy options.

The expected outcome of this paper is two-fold: The first aim is to better address key policy challenges that stem from Maldives' rapidly evolving economic and demographic dynamics. To this end, the paper proposes updated recommendations for national population and development policies.



The second goal of this paper is to inform the Maldivian leadership and the general public at large about the country's key population and development challenges. Therefore, the overall ambition of the analysis is to initiate a new conversation on population and development issues in Maldives.

## Methodology

The Maldives is experiencing impressive economic growth and has nearly completed its demographic transition. Yet, despite these opportunities, the country *faces several major challenges*.

Inspired by relevant sections of the UNFPA Population Situation Analysis (PSA) methodology (United Nations Population Fund, 2010), this report analyzes salient findings of the 2014 Population and Housing Census, as well as other data, against which we will review national policies and international best policy practices.

This report on Maldives' Population Dynamics: Policy Prospects for Human Growth and Opportunity is intended to complement the *Thematic Analysis on Youth* in the 2014 Maldives Census, commissioned by NBS and UNFPA.

## Outline

The report first presents Maldives' *economic and demographic background*, with a focus on the recent economic growth and the demographic transition.

We then turn to *results of the 2014 Census* before reviewing Maldives' population and social policies — in particular, the Maldivian government's historical views on population policies, the 2004 Population Policy, various reproductive health and social policies that have been adopted since then, as well as *election manifestos* and presidential speeches.

Thereafter, we review the three main population and development challenges that Maldives must address: improving young people's human capital, reproductive health access, and gender equality; capturing a potential first demographic dividend; and managing internal and international migration.

This analysis also attempts to assess the linkages and cross-cutting issues among these three thematic areas, including efforts to mitigate climate change, as well as synergies that can be catalyzed among these development priorities.

This paper concludes by charting a course to launch a new conversation on population and development policies in Maldives.

The way forward — strengthening these policies — entails four steps: bringing population issues within the country's overall development strategies; strengthening the institutional settings to address population issues; expanding population and development research; and enhancing thoughtful advocacy on population and development issues among Maldivian leadership and the general public.



Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

## Maldives' Economic and Demographic Background

The economic and demographic profiles of Maldives are impressive.

The Maldives' economy has expanded significantly in recent decades, especially during the last 15 years. In 2014, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita stood at \$4,521 (in constant 2003 prices), up more than 60% over the previous decade and a half (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

This rapid growth has been driven essentially by tourism, fisheries, and to a lesser extent, by the service sector (World Bank Group, 2015).

The demography of Maldives has also changed rapidly. The population appears to have almost completed its demographic transition, i.e., the shift from high to low crude rates of births and crude rates of deaths gradually reaching a new equilibrium between births and deaths. However, while both the economy and demography of Maldives offer great opportunities, they also present several major challenges.

## Economy

Maldives enjoys one of the highest gross national incomes (GNI) per capita in the South Asia region, as expressed in purchasing power parity (PPP) (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). The economic growth has built up during the past four decades, and especially during the last 15 years.

The multi-billion US dollars tourism industry, which started in 1972, is the main engine of the country's economic growth. In 2014, 1.2 million tourists visited the Maldives and stayed in 111 tourist resorts (it is planned that some will include Marinas), as well as guesthouses on inhabited islands (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015: 14). The tourism industry picked up again after the 2007-2008 Great Recession (International Monetary Fund, 2015: 4). The government has ambitious plans to develop the tourism industry even further, and the figure of five million tourists per year is sometimes mentioned as an overall goal for the sector. This goal would entail developing additional tourist resorts and guest houses, extending Ibrahim Nasir International Airport on Hulhulé Island, upgrading several regional airports, and improving the country's overall transportation system (planes, sea planes, ferries, and speed boats).

Fisheries are the second most important economic sector, tuna being the number one commodity of the country. In 2014, catches — mostly skipjack and yellowfin tuna — totaled 128,683 metric tons. Maldivians are experienced fishermen. (In 2014, a total of 8,596 fishermen were registered nationwide; see National Bureau of Statistics, 2015: 13).

Fishermen sell their catches to collector vessels across the country, which then provide them to processing plants. Fishermen can also sell catches on the local markets and/or use them for subsistence (fisheries make a significant contribution to food security, as fish is the primary source of protein in the Maldivian diet).

Some industrial fishing and mariculture industry exists; catches are processed in local factories located on industrial islands. Maldives also sells fishing rights to other countries. However, the government is concerned with the sustainability of fishing activities. Consequently, it has adopted stringent measures to protect the fisheries sector (e.g., banning of fishing nets, while still permitting pole and line fishing, as well as long-line fishing).

The third historically significant economic activity in Maldives is agriculture, which suffers from a scarcity of arable land and fairly poor quality soil. In 1980, agriculture (17%), fisheries (18%), and sand mining together comprised the primary sector, accounting for 35% of GDP (Republic of Maldives, 2013: 18). However, by the time tourism overtook fisheries in the mid-1980s as the lead sector of the economy, agriculture had declined to 9% of GDP. This decline has continued, with agriculture contributing less than 5% of GDP since 2006.

By 2013, the combined share of GDP from the Maldives' historical economic drivers (agriculture, sand mining, and fisheries) — which still employ the largest share of Maldivians in the outer atolls — was less than 0.3% (World Bank Group, 2014: 2-4). This raises questions about the inclusiveness of the present model of economic growth.

Some manufacturing also takes place, although the textile industry is no longer an important sector following the expiration of the quota system under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The construction sector is currently experiencing a boom in part related to the tourism sector. Finally, there is a limited service sector – essentially banking and telecommunication.

Economic growth of Maldives has triggered an important influx of immigrant workers, mostly from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India. The 2014 Population and Housing Census enumerated 63,637 foreigners living in Maldives who are legally classified as “temporary migrant workers” i.e.,<sup>1</sup> 16% of the total enumerated resident population of the country. However, a comparison with administrative records suggests that foreigners were significantly undercounted in the 2014 Census due to enumeration challenges (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 6).

Like other island economies, Maldives has a small domestic market and a limited labor force. Still, the country is far better positioned than most other island states and enjoys some of the *most rapid growth among developing* peers (Republic of Maldives, 2005b: 5). Today, Maldives qualifies as an upper middle income economy in the World Bank Group's classification. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) lists it as an emerging, developing economy.

Although the economy of Maldives is growing (Republic of Maldives, 2005a: i), it remains also relatively fragile. First, the tourism sector needs much more investments to build new and/or upgrade existing resorts and related infrastructure and transportation (Republic of Maldives, 2014a).

<sup>1</sup> Foreigners, who were labelled “Resident Foreigners” in the 2014 Census tabulations, should more appropriately be called “Temporary Migrant Workers”, i.e., people who have been issued work permits. Maldives does not use resident visas yet, and does not apply the U.S. “Green Card” concept (NBS, Personal communication).



## New population projections should present a very different picture of the Maldives' future population

Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

There is also a need to mitigate the effects of beach erosion and climate change, which could jeopardize the unique touristic capital of the country.

The tourism sector is also sensitive to the economic trends in the countries that are sending tourists to Maldives. About one-third of tourists visiting Maldives come from China, and the economic slowdown in that country may portend decreasing numbers of Chinese tourists. Last but not least, the tourism sector employs many foreigners, mainly from Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka.

Employment and population figures suggest that resident Maldivians (especially women) either do not want to work in the tourism industry (possibly for cultural reasons) or do not possess the required skills to access job opportunities in this sector. Of the 36,624 total residents enumerated on non-Administrative Islands — which are mostly resorts — just 394 were Maldivian women, or 1 percent.

Indeed, there is a dearth of qualified Maldivians to fill technical, middle, and senior management positions in the tourism sector (World Bank Group, 2014). As mentioned, the sector does rely heavily on foreign workers and this might also indicate a gap in the Maldivian education system.

Turning to fisheries, this sector may also suffer from the potential depletion of the major commodity, tuna, although Maldives' fishing strategies have been traditionally environmentally-friendly with the view of mitigating this risk. Maldives has also banned shark fishing. Pole and lines (often with one hook) remain the country's routine fishing methods, while fishing nets are not used. However, fishing nets are sometimes used by foreign poachers.

As mentioned, the agriculture sector suffers from the scarcity of cultivable land on the islands, the poor quality of soils, the narrow domestic market, and the excessive cost of transport for agricultural products. In fact, the future of the agriculture in Maldives is essentially linked to the potential expansion of the tourism sector. The service sector suffers also from the small size of the country's population and the narrow local market as well as from the geographical dispersion of the population across 187 inhabited islands (excluding Male').

Last but not least, *unemployment* in Male' and on the atolls can be *high* (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

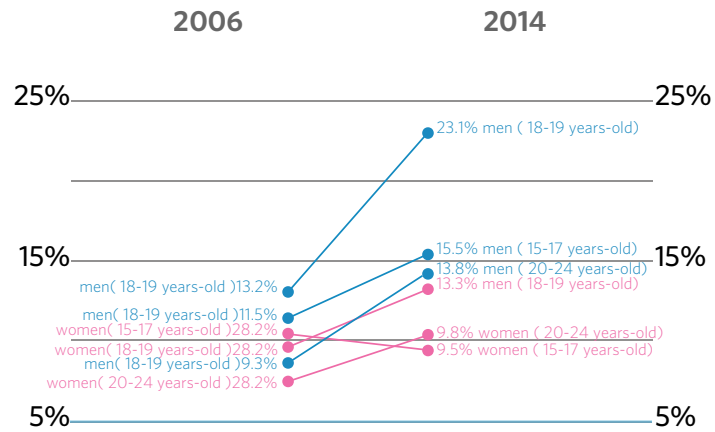
It has been estimated that outside of the capital Male', 60% of the youth is not in employment (International Monetary Fund, 2015: 4).

However, the 2014 Census results indicate much lower levels of youth unemployment, although youth unemployment has been increasing between 2006 and 2014. Over that period, unemployment rates on the Atolls for 18- to 19-year-old increased significantly from 17.8% to 28.2% for males, and increased from 19.2% to 23.2% for females (see Figure 2; see also Figure 32 in Republic of Maldives, 2015e).



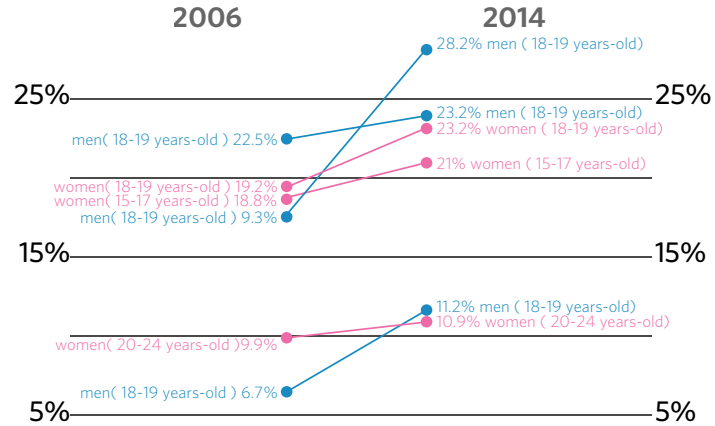
**Figure 1: Youth Unemployment in Male' is increasing**

Here's the breakdown by age and sex



**Figure 2: Youth Unemployment on the atolls is increasing**

Here's the breakdown by age and sex



Source 2006 & 2014 Census, NBS

## Demography

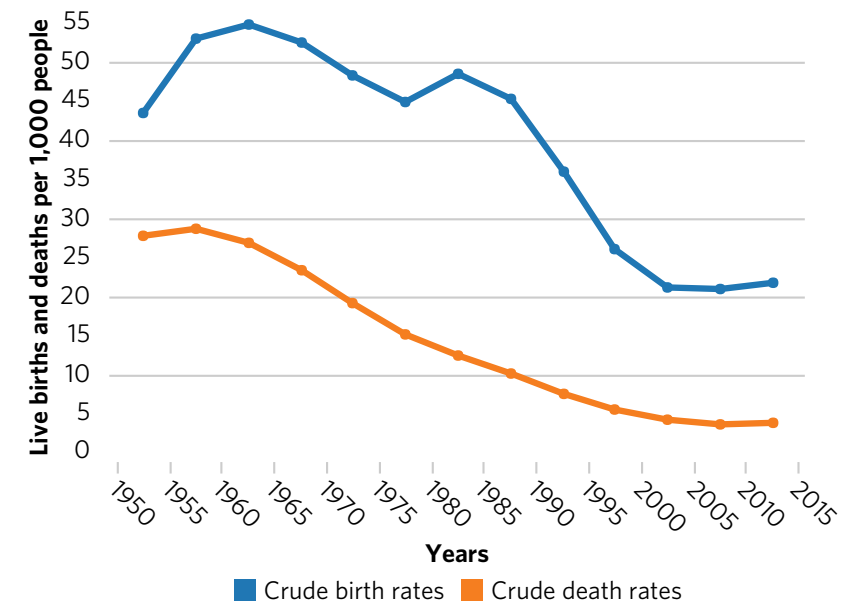
The Maldives' enumerated resident population during the September 2014 Population and Housing Census was 402,071 persons, including 338,434 resident Maldivians and 63,637 foreigners.

This figure of 402,071 residents does not include 5,589 non-resident Maldivians. Taking this sub-group into account, the total population counted in Maldives in September 2014 was 407,660 persons (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 13). By comparison, in 1911, the total population of Maldives was only 72,449 people (Maldives Census records and United Nations Population Fund, 2015).

Today, the population of Maldives appears to have almost completed its demographic transition. The crude birth rates (CBRs) and crude death rates (CDRs) have decreased consistently over the past 65 years, as shown in Figure 3 (United Nations, 2015). The crude death rate has decreased steadily and smoothly, whereas the decline of the crude birth rate has been less even.

In mid-2015, the crude birth rate and the crude death rate were estimated at 22 births and 3 deaths per thousand persons, respectively. This yields a natural rate of population growth of 1.9% per year in 2015 (Population Reference Bureau, 2015), implying a doubling time of the population of 36 years. The net rate of population increase in Maldives might be higher due to potentially increasing international migration.

**Figure 3: Maldives' crude birth rates (CBRs) and crude death rates (CDRs) per thousand, from 1950-1955 to 2010-2015**



Source: 2015 United Nations Population Projections

Given that the Maldives' population is probably reaching the end of its demographic transition process, it can no longer be qualified as a very young population, although nearly 50% of all Maldivian residents are still less than 25 years old.

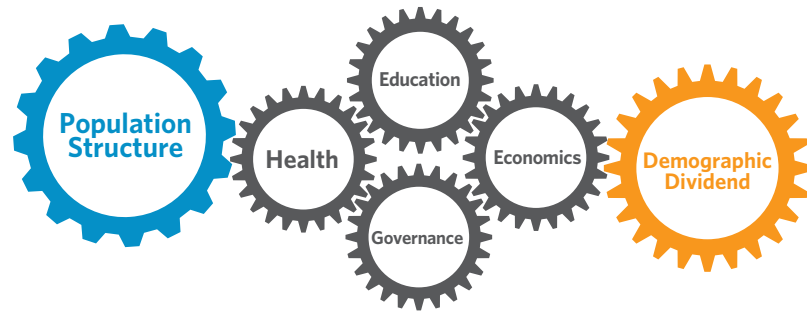
In 2014, people aged less than 15 years represented 27% of the total population, while older persons, aged 65 and above, accounted only for 5% of the total population of Maldives (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 25-26).

This changing age structure has important implications for the capturing of a first demographic dividend, because the active population has become much larger than the population of the young dependents and old dependents combined. Indeed, the active adult population between ages 15 and 64 represents 68% of the total population of Maldives.

However, this demographic window of opportunity will be limited in time because the population will inexorably become older when the country reaches the end of its demographic transition.

Therefore, the percentage of old dependents is set to increase rapidly after a few decades (the issue of the first demographic dividend will be discussed in more detail later).

## How the Demographic Dividend Works: An Illustration



A demographic dividend, or bonus, is the accelerated economic growth that can result from a rapid decline in a country's fertility and the subsequent change in its population's age structure. With fewer births each year, a country's working-age population grows larger in relation to the young dependent population. With more people in the labor force and fewer young people to support, a country can exploit this window of opportunity for rapid economic growth — if the right social and economic investments and policies are made in health, education, governance, and the economy. While the benefits of a dividend can be great, the gains are neither automatic nor guaranteed.

Source: Population Reference Bureau; see also Admassie, et al., 2015

## Population Densities

The emerged land area of Maldives is estimated to be about 300 square kilometers. With a total resident population of 402,071 people enumerated in the 2014 Census, the population density works out to be about 1,340 people per square kilometer as of September 2014.

However, the population density per square kilometer of arable land is much higher, and was estimated at 11,565 persons in mid-2015 (Population Reference Bureau, 2015).

This figure should actually be even higher in light of the 2014 Census results. Arable land is defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to include “the land under temporary agricultural crops (multiple-cropped areas are counted only once), temporary meadows for mowing or pasture, land under market and kitchen gardens and land temporarily fallow (less than five years)” (Population Reference Bureau, 2015).

## 'Modern' Demographic and Health Indicators

Nowadays, the population of Maldives benefits from what could be qualified as “modern” demographic and health indicators.

The current situation appears to be the end-result of sustained improvements in the health sector over the past two decades, as can be noticed when examining the results of previous surveys (see, for instance, Republic of Maldives, 2001).

This favorable demographic and health situation is illustrated, for instance, by the lowest infant mortality rate (9 deaths per 1,000 live births) in the South Asia region, a feature shared with Sri Lanka (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). In 2012, the under-five mortality rate was estimated at 11 deaths per 1,000 live births (Ministry of Health & Gender, 2014: 6).

With 2.5 children per woman on average, as established in the 2014 Census,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Two indirect questions on fertility were asked during the 2014 Census (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

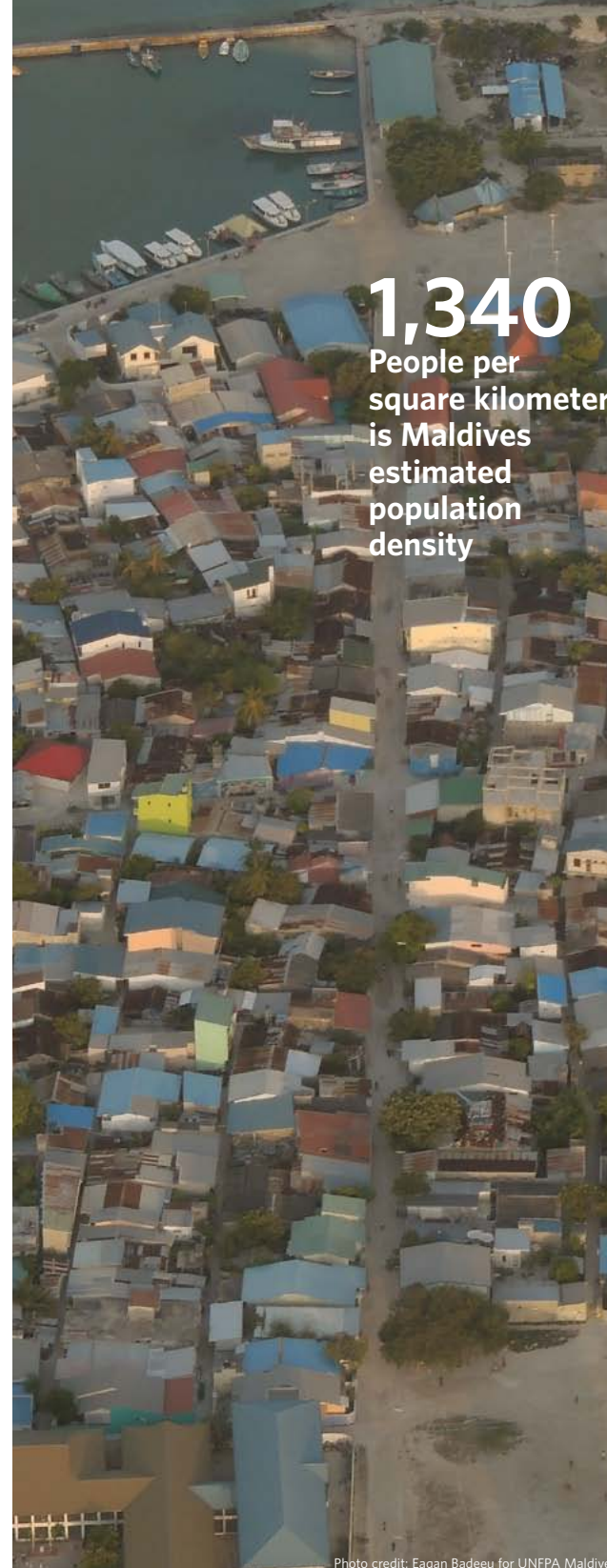


Photo credit: Eagan Badeu for UNFPA Maldives

Maldives has a total fertility rate (TFR) that is close to replacement level.

In 2006, the total fertility rate was estimated at 2.2 children per woman (Republic of Maldives, 2015f: 27). A possible explanation for the slight increase in the TFR in recent years could be the arrival into the reproductive age group of a large cohort of young people aged 10 to 14, who were enumerated during the 2006 Census.

Another explanation may be the good performances of the economy, which could entice couples to have more children. A new DHS survey is currently ongoing in Maldives under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, and the field work will start in 2016.

With respect to age at childbearing, Maldivian women are gradually having children at an older age and pregnancies among teenagers are rare, according to the 2009 DHS survey. Only 2% of adolescents have started childbearing. Very few teenagers have begun childbearing at age 18, while 7% have started at age 19 (Ministry of Health and Family and ICF Macro, 2010: 49 & 51).

## Gender Inequality

Despite these “modern” demographic and health indicators, several in-depth enquiries carried out in the country have highlighted severe gender imbalances.

These studies have stressed that the disadvantages facing women and girls are significant, especially in some of the most remote atoll-islands (for an overview of gender issues in Maldives, see Acharya, 2007; El-Horr and Pande, 2016; Republic of Maldives, 2015a).

Women continue to be discriminated against in health and the labor market. This is illustrated by the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which reflects women's disadvantage in three dimensions—reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market (Ministry of Finance & Treasury and UNDP 2014: 29). In addition, Maldivian women also experience specific reproductive health issues, such as domestic violence.

What is more worrisome is that gender inequalities appear to have worsened in Maldives during the past 10 years or so (Republic of Maldives, 2015a: 5).

Despite some achievements to address gender inequality, namely in the legal framework as well as in the education sector (where gender parity has



generally been reached), many other dimensions of gender equality are still wanting, as highlighted in the *Maldives National Gender Policy 2016-2021* (Republic of Maldives, 2015a: 6-8).

In particular, women's labor force participation rates have declined significantly in the four previous decades and women's unemployment rates are still highly disadvantageous as compared to men's (twice as many women than men are unemployed) (Republic of Maldives, 2015a: 7).

## Population Projections

It is important to estimate the future population of Maldives. The 2014 Population and Housing Census used a strict *de facto* enumeration (see the section Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census of this booklet).

Therefore, the new population figures for Maldives include the population of foreigners (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 13).

This will make necessary to undertake a revision of the population projections currently available for Maldives, which are mainly those of the United Nations (UN) Population Division.

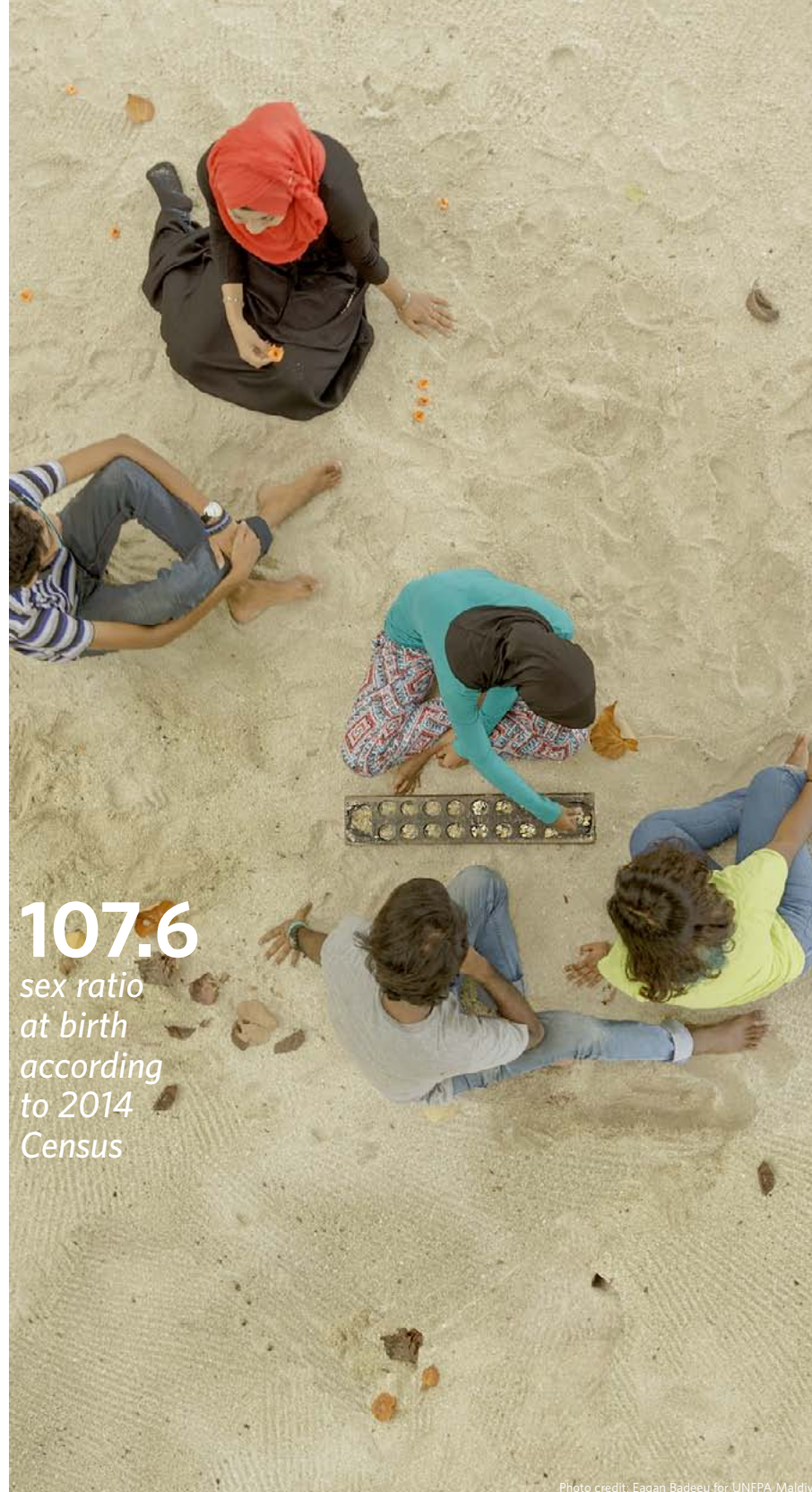
The base-population of these UN projections is the population enumerated in the 2006 Census (United Nations, 2015). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Male', with the assistance of a UNFPA Consultant, is preparing new population projections for Maldives. Until the results of those new projections are available, this analysis will rely on the 2015 UN population projections.

The 2015 UN projections, which take into account the resident Maldivians only, indicate that the population of the country is expected to increase from an estimated 364,000 persons in mid-2015 to 494,000 persons in 2050, based on the Medium variant assumption of fertility (United Nations, 2015). The figure of 364,000 persons in mid-2015 is obviously under-estimated, according to the 2014 Census results.

The 2015 UN projection assumptions for Maldives include a decrease in fertility over the projection period, from 2.2 children per woman in 2010-2015 to 1.7 children per woman in 2045-2050 (this does not fit with the total fertility rate of 2.5 children per woman estimated in the 2014 Census).

The projection scenario assumes an improvement in the life expectancy at birth (for both sexes combined) from 76.4 years in 2010-2015 to 82.7 years in 2045-2050. Finally, under the same scenario the net migration rate per 1,000 population is projected to be nil throughout the projections period (United Nations, 2015).

Again, this does not appear to be consistent with



**107.6**  
sex ratio  
at birth  
according  
to 2014  
Census

Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

the results of the 2014 Census, which point to the presence of many foreign immigrant workers in Maldives (which were probably under-enumerated). Once again, it should be stressed that these UN population projections pertain only to the resident Maldivian population.

The new population projections, which are being prepared, should present a rather different picture of the future population of Maldives as they should also take into account the population of foreigners.

## First Demographic Dividend

It is worth examining the potential for Maldives to capture a demographic dividend. The concept of the demographic dividend refers to the accelerated economic growth resulting from the changes in the age structure of the population.

However, without the right policies and especially expanded access of the youth to employment, this potential demographic bonus can rapidly turn out into a major challenge.

What is referred to here is the first demographic dividend, which helps create the wealth that will be converted later into assets (savings and investments). These assets can then help generate a second demographic dividend.

It is the relationship between the young dependents (age group 0 to 14) on the one hand, and the active adults (age group 15 to 64) on the other, which signals the opening of the demographic window of opportunity, namely the period during which a country can capture a first demographic dividend.

This relationship is called the child dependency ratio, i.e., the ratio of the population aged 0-14 per 100 population 15-64. However, various definitions have been proposed in the literature for the child dependency ratio (children between 0-14 or between 0-19). Moreover, in order to calculate the child dependency ratios more accurately, one should also take out of the total adult active population the adults who are either underemployed or unemployed.

Another approach is to calculate the total dependency ratio, i.e., including the children and the elderly dependents. When fertility declines, the youth weight of the dependency ratio decreases and the overall dependency ratio becomes more favorable.

Later, when population ageing sets in, the elderly weight of the dependency ratio increases (this is the old-age dependency ratio or the ratio of the population aged 65+ per 100 population 15-64).



At that time, the overall dependency ratio starts to become less favorable (for an in-depth discussion of these important issues, see Turbat, forthcoming).

According to the 2015 population projections of the UN Population Division, the child dependency ratio of Maldives was 54 in 2005, and decreased to 43.2 in 2010. The old-age dependency ratio was 7.2 in 2005 and 7.4 in 2010, and will increase steadily to 26.4 in 2050.

Assuming that the demographic window of opportunity opens when the child dependency ratio decreases below the value of 50 (El-Saharty et al., 2014: 10-11), one can say that Maldives have entered the demographic window of opportunity between 2005 and 2010.

The challenge now will be to capture the demographic dividend through the right mix of socioeconomic interventions and good governance policies.

### Population and Development Challenges

Despite its “modern” demographic and health regime, the population of Maldives still faces important challenges, particularly in the areas of youth’s human capital development, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality as well as internal and international migration.

Nonetheless, some of the evolving demographic dynamics of the country (e.g., the relative increase of the labor force as compared to the young dependents) could present great opportunities, namely the possibility of capturing a first demographic dividend. However, it must be kept in mind that such trends linked to the process of the demographic transition will also usher a process of population ageing.

The next section of this report, *Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census*, will throw more light on some of the demographic patterns and trends of Maldives.



**38%**  
of Maldivians  
live in the  
capital Male',  
a city on an  
island of about  
two square  
kilometers



Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

## Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census

This section reviews the 2014 Census results, including the population, the population distribution, the age and sex structure, the sex ratio and sex ratio at birth, and the migration patterns.

### Population

The 2014 Census enumerated a total population of 402,071 persons in Maldives at the end of September 2014. Among the total resident population of Maldives, 338,434 persons were resident Maldivians and 63,637 persons were foreigners.

In addition, 5,589 non-resident Maldivians were also recorded in the 2014 Census. As mentioned, the foreigners enumerated at the end of September 2014 represented 16% of the total resident population of Maldives (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 13).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics in Male', the figure of 63,637 foreigners is underestimated because the foreign population enumerated in the 2014 Census is less than the official figures recorded in immigration documents (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 6 & 13). Nonetheless, it is very hard to estimate the level of under-enumeration of the sub-population of foreigners.

### Population Distribution

The table of the resident population in September 2014 by sex and locality (atolls) provides some insights on the geographical distribution of the population of Maldives (see Table 1).

Each atoll in Maldives would usually encompass one large geographical atoll and comprises multiple Administrative Islands and non-Administrative Islands.

For the 20 atolls of the country, there are 187 (excluding Male') inhabited Administrative Islands and non-Administrative Islands. Therefore, each atoll comprises on average nearly 10 islands (with the exception of Fuvahmulah, which is composed of one island coextensive with the atoll).

Needless to say, each atoll-island has a population that is smaller, and sometimes much smaller, than the overall population of the Atoll (Maldives Census records; see also United Nations Population Fund, 2015 for a detailed list of the islands comprising each Atoll, along with their Census enumerated populations from 1911 until 2014).



The Atolls have a “traditional” name, but they are also known by their usual names; both names, traditional and usual, have been listed in Table 1.<sup>3</sup> The UNFPA poster provides the Atolls’ usual names (Maldives Census records and United Nations Population Fund, 2015).

In addition, it has been referred occasionally in the development planning documents of the Government of Maldives to 5 geographical regions and sometimes even to 7 geographical regions in the country. This has been done within the framework of the Population and Development Consolidation Policy, which has been initiated in 1998 but appears to be no longer prioritized nowadays (see the section *Bringing Population Issues within Overall Development Strategies*, sub-section *Population and Development Consolidation Policy* of this analysis).

To get back to the 2014 Census population distribution, the most striking feature is that in September 2014 the population of the Administrative Island of Male’ (the capital city of Male’ is about two square kilometers) represented more than 38% (i.e., over a third) of the total resident Maldivian population.

About 53% of the resident population was enumerated on 187 inhabited islands (not including the Administrative Island of Male’), 7% in 109 Resort islands (there are 111 Resort islands today), and finally 2% in Industrial and other non-Administrative Islands (Republic of Maldives, 2015c: 11).

Only three Atolls, i.e., South Thiladhunmathi (HDh), North Maalhosmadulu (R), and Addu City (S), had populations that were larger than 15,000 inhabitants. However, as it was mentioned, these Atolls are composed of collections small atoll-islands.

Therefore, the population of Maldives is even more scattered than these global figures would indicate (Maldives Census records and United Nations Population Fund, 2015).

The non-Administrative Islands (resorts as well as Industrial Island for industrial or official use) had a total population of 36,624 persons, a bit more than 9% of the total resident population of Maldives in September 2014. The Resorts had a population of 28,367 persons.

<sup>3</sup> Atoll names are listed in alphabetical codes, commencing from North, and given for the purpose of registering transport vessel. Initially, the codes were in the local language, Dhivehi, and the first letter of Dhivehi Alphabet was given to the first Atoll in the North. Very soon people became more comfortable in using alphabetical codes instead of the actual name of the Atoll, so codes became the names. During the 1970s, Dhivehi Alphabetical codes given to Atolls were replaced with English Alphabetical codes, for registration purposes. But the use of Dhivehi Alphabetical codes in referring to Atolls was not abandoned (NBS, Personal communication).



Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives



Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives



Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

It should also be noted that the foreigners (both sexes) outnumbered the resident Maldivians (both sexes) in the Resorts and on the Industrial Islands and Others, by a factor of 1.4 and 3.3, respectively.

Table 1: Maldives’ Resident Population, September 2014

	Both sexes	Male	Female
<b>Republic of Maldives</b>	<b>402,071</b>	<b>227,749</b>	<b>174,322</b>
<b>Male’</b>	<b>153,904</b>	<b>85,438</b>	<b>68,466</b>
<b>Atolls (Includes Administrative and non-Administrative Islands)</b>	<b>248,167</b>	<b>142,311</b>	<b>105,856</b>
<b>Administrative Islands (traditional names)</b>	<b>211,543</b>	<b>108,274</b>	<b>103,269</b>
North Thiladhunmathi (HA)	13,672	6,464	7,208
South Thiladhunmathi (HDh)	19,541	9,310	10,231
North Miladhunmadulu (Sh)	12,636	5,909	6,727
South Miladhunmadulu (N)	11,229	5,403	5,826
North Maalhosmadulu (R)	15,819	7,823	7,996
South Maalhosmadulu (B)	9,601	4,904	4,697
Faadhippolhu (Lh)	8,380	4,073	4,307
Male’ Atoll (K)	14,092	8,565	5,527
North Ari Atoll (AA)	6,475	3,456	3,019
South Ari Atoll (ADh)	9,086	4,913	4,173
Felidhu Atoll (V)	1,811	1,052	759
Mulakatholhu (M)	5,022	2,552	2,470
North Nilandhe Atoll (F)	4,365	2,161	2,204
South Nilandhe Atoll (Dh)	5,786	3,019	2,767
Kolhumadulu (Th)	9,656	5,020	4,636
Hadhdhunmathi (L)	12,676	6,648	6,028
North Huvadhu Atoll (GA)	9,221	5,126	4,095
South Huvadhu Atoll (GDh)	12,690	6,816	5,874
Gnaviyani (Gn)	8,510	4,085	4,425
Addu City (S)	21,275	10,975	10,300
<b>Non-Administrative Islands</b>	<b>36,624</b>	<b>34,037</b>	<b>2,587</b>
Resorts	28,367	26,093	2,274
Industrial Islands and Others	8,257	7,944	313

Source: Republic of Maldives, 2015b.

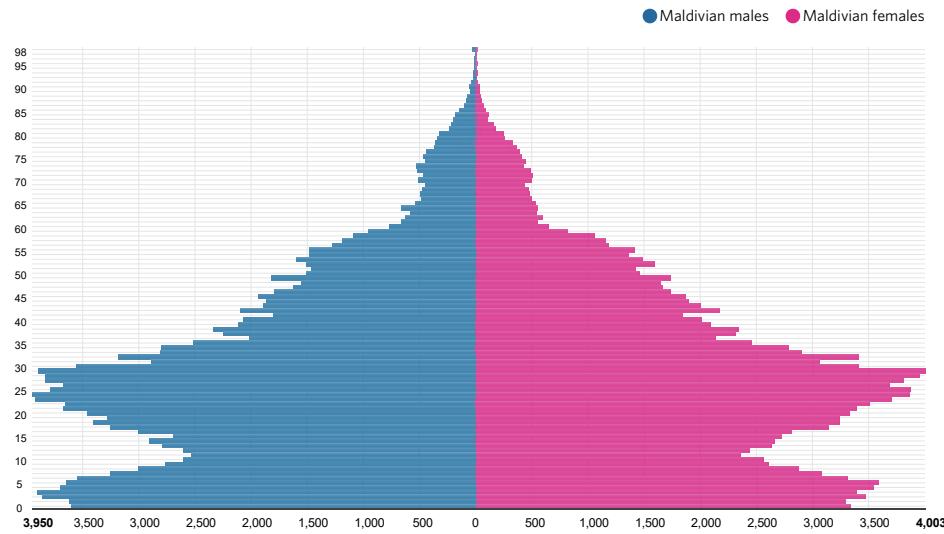
## Age and Sex Structure

At the time of the 2014 Census, the age distribution by age and sex of the resident Maldivian population was very different from the age distribution by age and sex of the total resident population (including foreigners). This is essentially due to immigration.

Two population pyramids illustrate this point (see Figure 4 and Figure 5, respectively). On Figure 3, one can see that the population pyramid of all residents in Maldives is heavily skewed to the left, because there are many more male immigrants than female immigrants in the age working age groups. This occurs mostly in the age range 18 to 35.

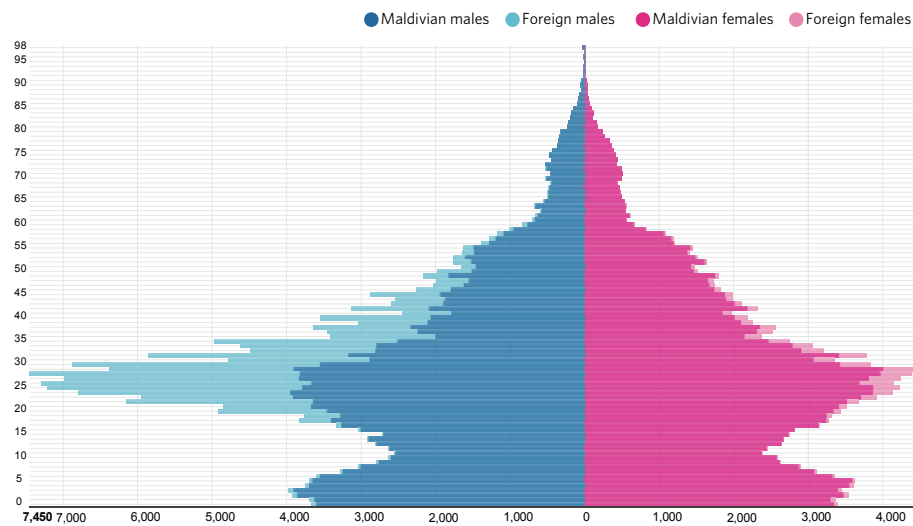
**Figure 4: Maldivian Resident Population of Maldives, September 2014 (N = 338,434)**

Source: Maldives 2014 Census



**Figure 5: Total Resident Population of Maldives, September 2014 (N = 402,071)**

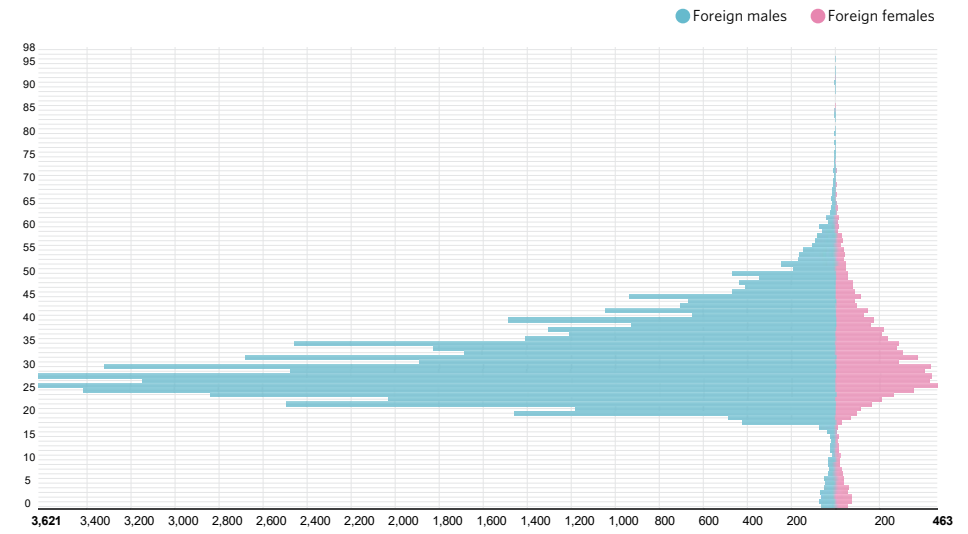
Source: Maldives 2014 Census



Focusing on the population of foreigners, one can see from another population pyramid, which presents only the foreigners (see Figure 6), that this population is composed essentially of men, who span the age bracket 18 to 55, with a concentration of men in the broad age group 18 to 35. It is essentially active men who migrate to Maldives in order to work.

**Figure 6: Foreign Population of Maldives, September 2014 (N = 63,637)**

Source: Maldives 2014 Census



## Sex Ratio and Sex Ratio at Birth

The sex ratio at birth is defined by the number of male births per 100 female births. The sex ratio for the overall population is the number of males per 100 females.

In September 2014, the sex ratio was 103.3 for the resident Maldivian population and it was 130.6 for the total resident population of Maldives, including foreigners (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 39).

Although changes of the sex ratio at birth may distort slightly the overall sex ratio (more later on the sex ratio at birth), immigration is the main explanatory factor for the high overall sex ratio of the total resident population of Maldives.

Male labor immigration is one factor, but one should also account for the emigration of Maldivian males. The distortion of the overall sex ratio might even be more severe in some Atolls.

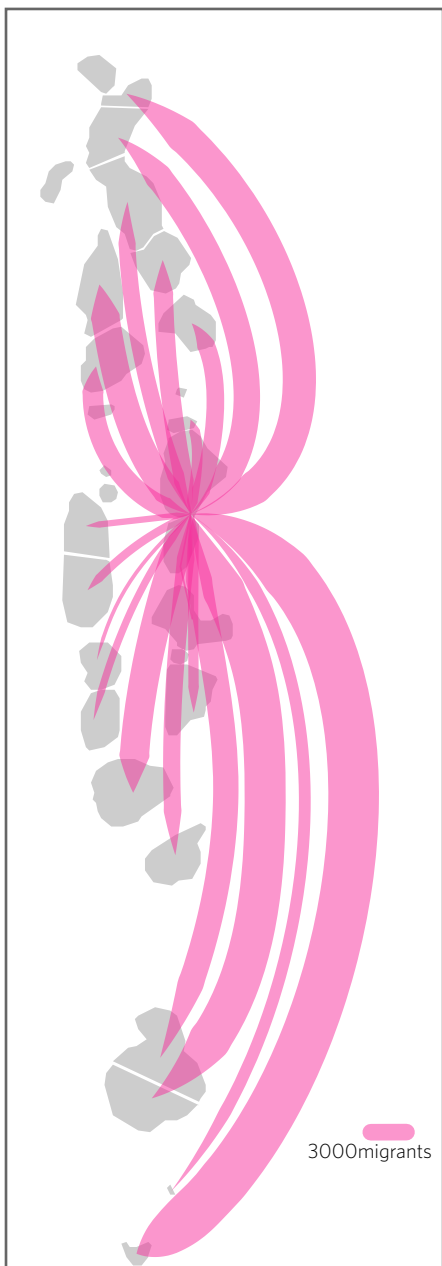
Within the population of foreigners, males are almost 6 times more numerous than females in Male', and males are almost 8 times more numerous than females in the Resorts (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 31). This points also to the sex ratio imbalance among the immigrants to Maldives, as vividly illustrated by the population pyramid of foreigners (see Figure 6).

The results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census indicate also a possible shift in the sex ratio at birth, as reflected by the proportion of boys relative to girls in the two youngest age-groups (age 0 and age group 0 to 4).

With respect to the resident Maldivians, the 2014 Census enumerated 18,682 males and 17,030 females in the age group 0 to 4 (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 39), indicating that the sex ratio at birth could possibly have climbed to 110:100.

An examination of the population of the age group 0 indicates that the sex ratio in that group is 107.5 (in September 2014, 3,696 boys were enumerated in the age group 0 against 3,437 girls).





**Figure 7: Migration flows to Male'**

*Based on comparison of resident Maldivians' place of registration and usual residence (2014 census Table MG2)*

Census under-enumeration of young girls and/or higher mortality levels among young girls could explain, at least partly, this high sex ratio (a normal sex ratio at birth would be close to 105:100).

This possible sex ratio imbalance at birth could be a new feature or at least an emerging trend in the demography of Maldives. According to data from the vital statistics records, which are documented in the *Statistical Yearbook of Maldives 2015*, the number of male and female births for the period 2012-2014 yields a sex ratio at birth of 107.6 (Republic of Maldives, 2015g; Table 3.9). Therefore, the imbalance of the sex ratio at birth in the vital statistics appears to be consistent with what was observed in the age group 0 during the 2014 Census.

### Migration Patterns

The 2014 Population and Housing Census results provide also information on migration in Maldives, in particular on the migratory movements of resident Maldivians between the Atolls (comprised of Administrative Islands and non-Administrative Islands) and, to some extent, on the international migratory movements.

The 2014 Census measured internal migration through Census questions on the place of birth, the place of registration, the place of usual residence, and the place of previous residence. The Census questionnaire also asked about the reasons for migration (Republic of Maldives, 2015c; see also National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In addition, the 2014 Census captured information on international migration for the population of foreigners in Maldives.

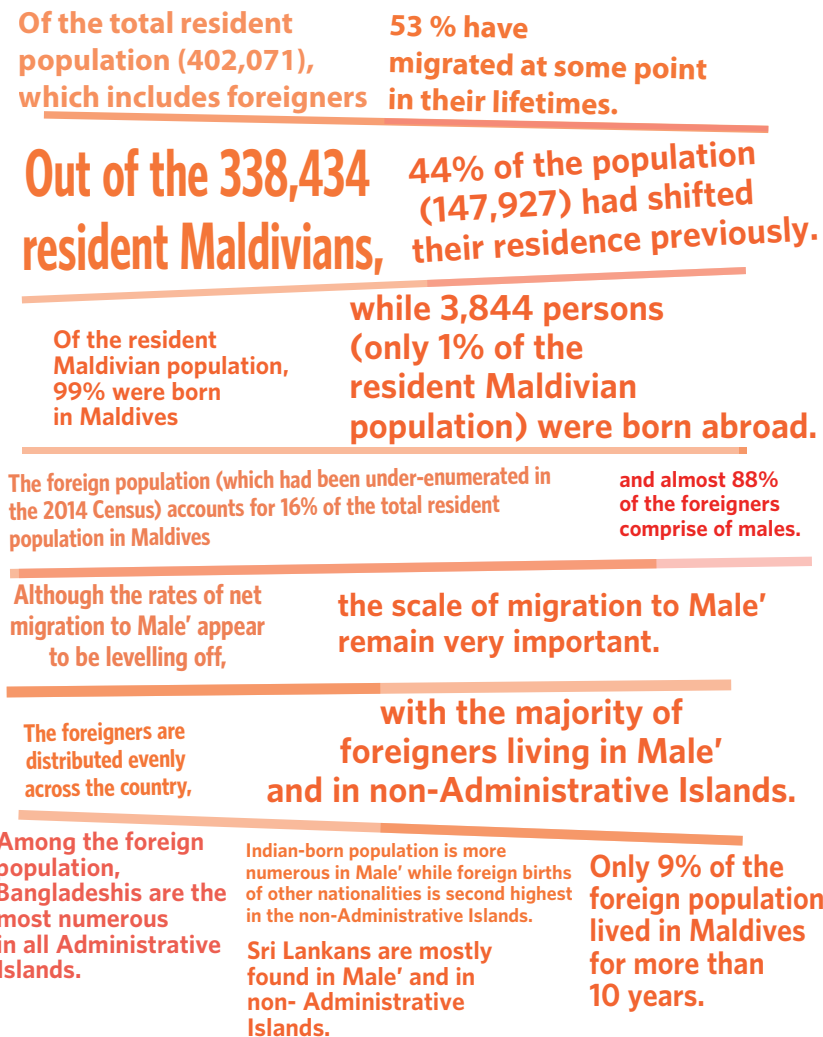
From the data collected during the 2014 Census, the measurement of the migratory movements of the population is based essentially on the comparison of data on the place of previous residence with the place of usual residence at the time of the Census (it should be noted that the strict *de facto* enumeration method used during the 2014 Census may have distorted some of the information collected).

A migrant is defined as a person who has lived outside of his/her usual residence for one year or more at any time in the past. However, there are limitations in interpreting lifetime migrants using the information on the place of birth. In fact, migratory movements since the birth of the

individual and the recording of his/her information at the time of the Census may not capture migratory movements that have taken place between the birth of the respondent and the Census enumeration.

A recent publication from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) provides a summary of the migration patterns in the country (Republic of Maldives, 2015c). The most salient findings of this analysis can be summarized in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Migration patterns**



Some of these findings are also visualized in figure 7.

It is also interesting to examine the reasons for migrating. The main reason for migrating to Male' is education. This reason is cited by 50% or more of respondents among the boys and the girls in the age groups 15-19 and 20-24 years old. However, it should be pointed out that about 30% among this group declare also not attending any school program. The second reason cited for migration by the residents of Male' is to look for employment. This reason is cited by more than 20% of men aged 20-24 and by almost 30% of men in the age groups 25-29 and 30-34 (2014 Census data). Another reason to come to Male' may include access to medical services at the health tertiary level.

## Maldives' Population and Social Policies

In this report, population policies are defined as the actions taken explicitly or implicitly by public authorities in order to prevent, delay, or address imbalances between demographic changes, on the one hand, and social, economic, environmental, and political goals, on the other. Population policies may be explicit or implicit, meaning that proposed interventions are either stated clearly or just implied (May, 2012: 42).

### Government of Maldives' Views on Population Policies

In 1963, the United Nations (UN) initiated a series of population policy inquiries (the *United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development*), which were conducted every five years. As of 2013, the UN had conducted eleven such enquiries.

The results, which are complemented by additional information, are published in the biennial UN reports *World Population Policies* (United Nations, 2013).

For each country, the results capture the evolution of governments' views and policies with respect to population size and growth, population age structure, fertility, reproductive health and family planning, health and mortality, spatial distribution and internal migration, and international migration.

These questionnaires are most useful in two respects. First, they capture the evolution of governments' views on demographic trends and policy variables. Second, the questionnaires reflect also governments' perceptions on these trends and variables. Sometimes these perceptions are more important than the trends themselves when it comes to the formulation of population policies.

In the latest installment of this ongoing inquiry, which was published in 2013 (United Nations, 2013), the Government of Maldives expressed major concerns with respect to several aspects of the population trends, namely the working-age population, adolescent fertility (the Government wants to reduce adolescent fertility), violence against women, overweight and obesity, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and irregular migration.

In the same survey, the Government of Maldives expressed minor concerns with regard to the ageing of the population (there has been an ongoing pension reform in the last five years) and the incidence of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Among the measures to address HIV/AIDS, the Government has implemented several interventions, including blood



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Photo credit: Aminath Nadha for UNFPA Maldives

screening, information, education and communication campaigns, antiretroviral treatment, non-discrimination policies (legal measures), distribution of condoms, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

In the UN 2013 population policy enquiry, the Government of Maldives considered some population trends as being satisfactory, such as the rate of growth of the population, the fertility levels, and the levels of immigration and emigration.

The Government wanted to maintain its policies regarding the last three issues, as well as to keep its policies on the permanent settlements, the temporary workers, and the family reunification.

However, the Government wanted to increase its policy interventions pertaining to highly-skilled workers. Major policy changes were sought also on spatial distribution and migration from rural to urban areas.

The Government wanted to curb migration into urban centers and restrict the policy on naturalization, although it accepts dual citizenship. There was no policy in place to encourage the return of Maldivian citizens. However, the Government of Maldives has contemplated measures to attract investments by Maldivians leaving abroad as well as by foreigners (Republic of Maldives, 2014a).

Despite great improvements on several fronts in the past decades, some issues and/or levels of indicators were still deemed to be unacceptable, including life expectancy at birth (deemed too low) and undernutrition of children (deemed too high).

However, levels of under-five mortality and maternal mortality were considered to be acceptable.

Last but not least, induced abortion is prohibited in Maldives except for certified reasons, for which the consent of the spouse is required.

Overall, the Government of Maldives had been concerned with balancing population growth and economic and ecological pressures. The main focus of the Government's policy on reproductive health (RH) had been on birth spacing in order to improve maternal and child health.

In 1992, the Government established targets for fertility and contraceptive prevalence, which are no longer in use. The Government had also developed educational programs on population issues, and had offered extensive family planning services. All methods of contraception are legal, but prescriptions are required for some methods.

### 2004 Population Policy of the Maldives

The 2004 Population Policy of the Maldives (Republic of Maldives, 2004) is labelled a Working Document. One of the overall objectives of the Population Policy was to create the synergies between the various sectoral interventions, in order to achieve the various goals of the policy (more on these policy goals below). The 2004 Population Policy also supported the view that there can be no sustainable development without full gender equality<sup>4</sup> (Republic of Maldives, 2004: 21).

The 2004 Population Policy can be analyzed along the framework of the three population and development challenges that have been identified earlier in this analysis, namely the youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality, the capturing of the first demographic dividend, and the management of internal and international migration.

<sup>4</sup>The Maldives' Ministry of Law and Gender has prepared since a *National Gender Policy 2016-2021* (Republic of Maldives, 2015a) (more on this later).



Overall, the 2004 Population Policy appears to be a truly post-ICPD document and, as such, it focused a great deal on reproductive health (RH) and gender issues (see also Government of the Republic of Maldives, 1994a).

To the extent that the 2004 Population Policy wanted to promote socioeconomic development, it could be argued that the document covered also (at least indirectly) the issue of the demographic dividend (DD).

One should remember that the concept of the DD entered the international population policy discussions after the issuance of the 2004 Population Policy of the Maldives. Finally, it should be stressed that the 2004 Population Policy paid much less attention to migratory movements and climate change.

With respect to the *youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality*, the 2004 Population Policy announced a series of general and/or specific objectives, with quantified and time-bound targets, as follows:

- Reduce fertility levels to near replacement over the next 20 years (Goal 2);
- Reduce maternal mortality ratio to under 100 per 100,000 live births by the year 2010 (Goal 3);
- Reduce infant mortality rate to under 15 per thousand live births by 2020 (Goal 4);
- Reduce the current level of malnutrition by half by 2020 (Goal 5);
- Provide adequate care and services for the elderly and people with special needs (Goal 6);
- Promote awareness on reproductive health and responsible parenting (Goal 7);
- Promote equitable distribution of health services (Goal 8);
- Promote a healthy life style for all (Goal 9);
- Reduce the divorce rate by half by the year 2010 (Goal 12);
- Achieve gender equality and equity through equal participation of women and men in social, economic, and political development (Goal 13);
- Provide population education to children, adolescent, and adults (Goal 14);
- Promote sports and recreation among all (Goal 15);
- Establish proper sanitation systems in all inhabited islands by 2010 (Goal 17); and
- Achieve 100% accessibility to safe drinking water by 2010 (Goal 18).

The economic growth and the (first) demographic dividend were covered more extensively in the 2004 Population Policy. Whilst the issue of the demographic dividend was covered indirectly, the policy listed a series of goals geared at fostering overall economic growth, namely:

- Reduce population growth rate to a sustainable level by 2020 and achieve stable population growth by 2050 (Goal 1);



The ultimate goal of this ambitious policy could be to relocate possibly 100,000 people in Hulhumale

Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

- Provide good housing and a pleasant living environment for all by 2015 (Goal 10);
- Improve the quality of life of human settlements (Goal 11);
- Provide reliable and affordable electricity to all households by 2020 (Goal 16);
- Increase employment opportunities to improve individual economic self-reliance (Goal 21);
- Optimize the employment of Maldivians in all sectors (Goal 22);
- Provide affordable communication services throughout the country by 2010 (Goal 23); and
- Promote optimum use of the internet (Goal 24).

With respect to *migratory challenges*, the 2004 Population Policy listed only two goals, namely:

- Promote safe and affordable transport throughout the country by 2015 (Goal 25); and
- Promote internal migration to facilitate population and development consolidation and to reduce in-migration to selected islands (Goal 26).

Finally, the 2004 Population Policy covered the issue of *climate change and sustainable development*, albeit sketchily, as follows:

- Establish proper waste management systems throughout the country by 2010 (Goal 19); and
- Promote sustainable resource use and consumption (Goal 20).



## Other Reproductive Health and Social Policies

Maldives is among the 179 countries who endorsed the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) in Cairo in September 1994 (United Nations Population Fund, 1996). The PoA's specific goals were based on several broad thematic areas, as follows:

- Reducing poverty through increased economic activity in the backdrop of sustainable development;
- Providing universal access to education (especially for women and girls);
- Reducing maternal and infant mortality, prevention and control of HIV/AIDS;
- Protecting certain population groups such as youth, elderly and disabled, promoting the well-being of families, individuals and the society;
- Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women;
- Providing universal access to reproductive health and ensuring reproductive rights; and
- Protecting the rights of internal and international migrants.

In addition to the 2004 Population Policy, a number of other policy documents were written under the auspices of the Government of Maldives with the view of supporting the broad objectives listed above (see United Nations Population Fund, 2014 for an analysis of these policies).

*The Health Master Plan 2006-2015* (Republic of Maldives, 2006) was based on 10 policy goals, namely to: ensure that people have the appropriate knowledge and practices to protect and promote their health; ensure that safe and supportive environments are in place to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of the people; improve the quality of basic and emergency maternal and newborn health (MNH) services; ensure that all citizens have equitable access to comprehensive primary health care; establish and enforce appropriate quality assurance and regulatory frameworks for patient and provider safety; build public-private partnerships in health; build a competent and professional health workforce; ensure that the health system is financed by a sustainable and fair mechanism; enhance the response of the health system in case of emergencies; and build a culture of evidence-based decision making within the health system. A new *Health Master Plan* is currently under preparation at the Ministry of Health and should be ready by the end of 2016 (Government of Maldives, 2015).

*The National Reproductive Health Strategy 2014-2018* (Republic of Maldives, 2014b) lists a series of key interventions, namely: increase quality of care for family planning; promote institutional deliveries to take place at the closest facilities from home; improve the quality of basic and emergency MNH services; improve the linkages between sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and STI/HIV services; collaborate to implement life skills education in schools; strengthen services for RH morbidities, special groups, gender-based violence



**27%**  
Contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods in Maldives, which is not consistent with the low total fertility rate

Photo credit: Aminath Nadha for UNFPA Maldives



Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

(GBV), and crisis situation; and address key health system issues related to reproductive health.

In addition, the Maldives' Ministry of Law and Gender has issued the *Maldives National Gender Policy 2016-2021* (Republic of Maldives, 2015a). The *National Gender Policy* is based on four pillars, namely Leadership and Governance, Economic Empowerment, Institutional Gender Mainstreaming, and Gender Based Violence. It offers also a detailed Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, with a set of indicators for each of the four dimensions (Republic of Maldives, 2015a; see Annex E). The *National Gender Policy* complements the *Health Master Plan 2006-2015* and the new *Health Master Plan*, as well as the *National Reproductive Health Strategy 2014-2018*.

Moreover, two policy documents of Maldives pertain to the youth. *The National Youth Health Strategy* (Republic of Maldives, 2011) aims to promote and maintain complete physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health and well-being of the Maldivian youth with the view of improving their quality of life.

The document *National Standards for Adolescents and Youth Friendly Health Services* defines adolescent and youth friendly health services through the use of national standards. These national standards have been developed to address the challenges identified with the current provision of health services to adolescents and young people.

An annex of the *National Standards for Adolescents and Youth Friendly Health Services* document elaborates on the package of services that is to be made accessible to all young people at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of the health system of Maldives.

With the exception of the *National Gender Policy*, the policy documents in Maldives could be revised and/or improved in order to prioritize reproductive health and sexual health as well as gender considerations.



For instance, the new *Health Master Plan* could include specific strategies focusing on reproductive and sexual health. It would also be necessary to include sexual education in school curriculum. In addition, the policy documents and strategies of Maldives would need to stress several overall development goals, namely: develop education at the secondary and tertiary levels; provide jobs training for young people; address gender imbalances (in line with the *National Gender Policy*); tackle climate change; address migration issues, including sex ratio imbalances; and formulate strategies and policies in anticipation of the population ageing process.

Finally, the new *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), which were adopted in September 2015, will also help chart the population and development policies and programs in Maldives.

The SDGs are built on the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), which were 8 anti-poverty goals that the world committed to achieving by 2015. The SDGs are part and parcel of a new, broader sustainable development agenda.

The aim of the SDGs is to engage governments, the private sector, and the civil society in order to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.

The 17 goals of the SDGs are as follows: poverty, food, health, education, women, water, energy, economy, infrastructure, inequality, habitation, consumption, climate, oceans, ecosystems, institutions, and sustainability. Each goal has specific targets (there are 169 targets altogether) that need to be achieved over the next 15 years, covering the period 2016 to 2030. In addition, there are 304 proposed indicators to demonstrate compliance.

Two targets will be particularly important to complete the agenda of reproductive health in Maldives. Under Goal No. 3, Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, Target 3.7 stipulates: "By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes".

Under Goal No. 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, Target 5.6 stipulates: "Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action (PoA) of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences" (see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>). The challenge will be to implement these two RH-related targets nationwide in Maldives, especially in the most remote atolls.

The framework of the SDGs will also be useful to tackle other development challenges, including climate change. The overall improvement of socioeconomic conditions, which is the overall objective of the SDGs, will also help inform public policies that will need to be in place in order to improve the youth's human capital (e.g., education and health) and capture a first demographic dividend.



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## Maldives' Population and Development Challenges

At this juncture, it appears that the country needs to prioritize three specific challenges, namely: to improve youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality; to capture the first demographic dividend; and to manage internal and international migration. In addition, one will need to examine the linkages as well as the cross-cutting issues between these three areas, including the mitigation of the effects of climate change.

### Improving Youth's Human Capital, Reproductive Health Outcomes, and Gender Equality

The young people of today are the workers and economic entrepreneurs of tomorrow. The youth will be the main engine of the future social and economic development of the country.

For this to happen, however, the youth will need to be properly trained, to acquire skills that will be marketable, and last but not least to be in good health. Above all, the youth will need job opportunities. In short, the youth will need much policy attention. Public policies will need to be put in place today in order to foster the accomplishments of the young Maldivians tomorrow.

In the 2014 Population and Housing Census, it was established that the population below age 25 represented 47.5% of the resident Maldivians. The proportion was a bit lower, i.e., 43.2% for the total resident population of Maldives (Republic of Maldives, 2015b: 39). These figures point to the need to focus more attention to youth policies in Maldives.

To build the youth's human capital (education and health), the first goal should be to provide all young Maldivians with the opportunities to acquire the necessary skills and get the education that will later bring jobs.

Building the human capital of the youth will be crucial to capturing the first demographic dividend. As such, the issue of youth's human capital is closely linked to the economic acceleration that could be achieved with capturing the first demographic dividend. In particular, more work will be needed to link the higher education curriculum with the new needs and requirements of the economy.

In addition, the youth will need also to be in good health. With respect to reproductive health, recent surveys and analyses indicate that several areas need more attention, despite the achievements that have been obtained during the previous decades.

Attaining a regime that ensures universal access to



reproductive health (RH) will require *inter alia* improving the safety of pregnancy and childbirth, avoiding undesired pregnancies, eliminating gender inequalities and discrimination as well as gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence, and mitigating the incidence of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The overall goal should be to implement fully the RH Agenda that was defined at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in September 1994. In order to fulfill this RH Agenda, it will be also necessary to address the issues of gender equality.

A major task will be to improve reproductive health (RH) outcomes throughout the country, especially on the remote atoll-islands. In this respect, access to services will need to abide by the provisions of the Programme of Action (PoA) endorsed at the 1994 ICPD (United Nations Population Fund, 1996).

In particular, the provision of RH services should be guided by PoA Principle 8, which stipulates that “everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” (United Nations Population Fund, 1996: 10).

Anecdotal evidence points to the potential problem of induced abortion, especially among young women and adolescent girls. An indication of the prevalence of induced abortion might be the lack of consistency observed between the low total fertility rate (TFR) estimated at 2.5 children per woman (2014 Census data) and the relatively low contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR), which is estimated at 27% for modern methods (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). The CPR for modern methods appears to be way too low to explain the current level of the TFR.

Two additional issues will require more attention as well. First, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) does not seem to keep improving, and the causes of this situation are still unclear.

Another issue is the possible imbalance of the sex ratio at birth (see the section *Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census* of this analysis), as it has been highlighted from the findings of the 2014 Population and Housing Census and the vital registration data.

The Government of Maldives is committed to make progress in the area of reproductive health and has adopted a series of policies aimed specifically at RH issues (United Nations Population Fund, 2014; see also the section *Maldives’ Population and Social Policies* of this paper).

In order to fulfill this RH Agenda, the Government of Maldives is receiving technical and financial assistance from its development partners, including the United



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Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

It could be envisaged to design a new policy focusing on human capital investments for the youth, possibly under the heading of a “Youth’s Human Capital Development Plan”.

Such a policy should be informed by up-to-date demographic information and analysis, and would also help chart the future pathways of socioeconomic development for Maldives. Indeed, the policies needed to capture a demographic dividend will imply major efforts to build the youth’s human capital (e.g., education and health).

Improving youth’s human capital and youth reproductive health outcomes will need to be complemented by policies addressed at reducing gender inequality. As it has been stressed earlier in this analysis, the gender inequality situation calls for urgent and proactive policies, which have been outlined in the *Maldives National Gender Policy 2016-2021*.

In particular, one of the key objectives of the *National Gender Policy* is to improve the enabling environment for greater participation of women in economic development.

Gender equality interventions should also be comprehensive, in accordance with the World Economic Forum 3E Framework, i.e., “Empower, Educate, Employ” (World Economic Forum, 2015).

## Capturing the First Demographic Dividend

Maldives has the potential to capture a demographic dividend (DD). As mentioned, it is the first DD that is referred to here (Lee and Mason, 2006). The DD can be defined as the accelerated economic growth that is triggered when the working-age population is growing in relation to the number of young dependents (Turbat, forthcoming).

A clear distinction needs to be made among the demographic window of opportunity, the capturing of the first demographic dividend itself, and the other macro-economic and good governance policies that are also necessary to take advantage of the first demographic dividend (Gribble and Bremner, 2012).

As of 2015, Maldives had a favorable child dependency ratio of 40.5 children below age 15 to 100 adults aged 15-64. This ratio had improved significantly in the previous 10 years, decreasing from 54 in 2005 to 43.2 in 2010 (United Nations, 2015).

Maldives has entered the demographic window of opportunity in 2005-2010, and this may well enable the country to capture a first demographic dividend (see the section *Maldives’ Economic and Demographic Background* of



this booklet).

Again, it must be mentioned that capturing the DD will require investments aimed at improving the human capital (e.g., education and health), as well as a wide spectrum of sound socioeconomic interventions and good governance policies (Gribble and Bremner, 2012).

In this respect, one will need to assess the quality of current investments, through cost-effectiveness analyses. Maldives have high social spending (including for youth, health, and education), but one should ask whether this spending is producing the best results at the lowest possible costs.

It would also be useful to assess the generational economy (i.e., the generational transfers of wealth), through a National Transfer Accounts (NTA) analysis.

In the future, policies needed to capture the DD will require more attention than it seems to have been the case in Maldives during the past decades.

In particular, any analysis of the DD will need to take into account the employment potential of the currently high number of unemployed youth (possibly up to 60% on some remote atoll-islands), and link this issue to the migration policies that see many foreign workers in positions that could possibly be occupied by Maldivians.

In addition, the analysis of the DD will need to look at the income levels of the various segments of the population (using a wealth quintiles classification).

Last but not least, the country will need also to pay more attention to population ageing, which will emerge inexorably as the country goes through the final stages of its demographic transition. In particular, Maldives will need to reassess the role of funded pensions and to determine which retirement security system would be the most appropriate for its population in the decades to come (Jackson and Nakashima, 2015).

## Managing Internal and International Migration

Another issue that the country will need to address is the migratory challenges, both internal and international.

Currently, the population of the country is scattered across 187 inhabited islands, not including Male' (out of a total of 1,192 islands dispersed on 20 Atolls). However, as mentioned, the population is far from being evenly distributed geographically or spatially.

During the 2014 Census, over a third of the population (38%) was enumerated in the capital Male', which is one of the densest urban areas in the world (Republic of Maldives, 2015b; Hsiang and Mendis, 2013: 705).

Although a limited number of highly populated islands could also qualify as urban areas, population densities are generally much lower outside the capital city and Male' is classified as the country's only urban area for Census purposes.



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The disparities in the spatial distribution of the population raise the unit costs of providing public services (e.g., education and health) and result often in a lack of employment opportunities, which affects primarily the youth (International Monetary Fund, 2015: 4).

Moreover, the country receives many foreigners. This highlights the issue of international immigration, in addition to the migratory movements among the 187 inhabited islands of the country (not including Male') and between those islands and the capital city.

As it was mentioned in the section *Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census* of this analysis, the 2014 Population and Housing Census enumerated 338,434 resident Maldivians and 63,637 foreigners. This latter figure does not reflect the actual number of foreigners, which have been under-enumerated (Republic of Maldives, 2015b).

These foreigners come primarily from Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka and work mostly in the tourism, construction, and services sector. To be sure, only 9% of foreigners live in Maldives for more than 10 years (Republic of Maldives, 2015b). Nonetheless, this sub-population of foreigners will need to be taken into account in public policies geared at population and development, along with the larger segment of resident Maldivians.

After the 2004 tsunami, the Government of Maldives had decided to relocate the population affected by the catastrophe in an attempt to regroup the population, facilitate the delivery of public services (therefore reducing unit costs), and regulate internal migration movements (this relocation policy had actually been initiated in 1998). The policy became known as the *Population and Development Consolidation Policy* (more on this in the section *Toward a New Conversation on Population and Development* of this booklet). The treatment of migrants will need to abide by the provisions of the Programme of Action (PoA) endorsed at the 1994 ICPD, as well as the 46th Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development (UNCPD).

Principle 12 of the PoA stipulates that "countries receiving documented migrants should provide proper treatment and adequate social welfare services for them and their families" (United Nations Population Fund, 1996: 11).

In recent years, the number of resorts and industrial islands has increased rapidly as compared to the 2006 Census, and their population has increased rapidly as well. In such islands, males outnumber females (because of male immigration) and this sex ratio imbalance has implications on the family formation, making these families more vulnerable.

The rapid expansion of the tourism industry (as of today, there are 111 tourist resorts) will pose new challenges for migratory policies throughout the country.



## Linkages, Cross-cutting Issues, and Climate Change

It should be stressed that the three challenges that have been identified, namely the improvement of the youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality, the capturing of the first demographic dividend, and the management of internal and international migration are all interrelated.

For instance, the health status of the population is important to make the labor force more productive, which in turn will boost productivity and foster economic performance. Similarly, migratory and population and development consolidation policies are inevitably linked to the availability of new job opportunities. Finally, the new job opportunities themselves are, among other factors, linked to the availability of new land settlements and additional economic investments (e.g., in tourism), which will need also to be environmentally sustainable.

Therefore, it will be necessary to explore the linkages between the various demographic and development challenges that have been identified and translate these linkages into actionable policies.

To do so, one should adopt a holistic approach and link the population and development policies to the overall development strategies of Maldives.

In this respect, the 3E Framework "Empower, Educate, Employ", which has been proposed by the World Economic Forum will also help to seize the synergies across the various priorities that have been identified.

In addition, Maldives must mitigate the consequences of climate change, which is a real threat to both the expansion of the tourism industry and the survival of many fragile island ecosystems. The emerged land-area (about 300 square kilometers of low-lying islands) accounts for less than a third of a percent of a large sea-area of 90,000 square kilometers.

This makes Maldives particularly vulnerable to climate change and the rise of the sea levels. The country could possibly be submerged partly or even almost entirely as the seas continue to rise (see Worldwatch Institute, 2013: 346).

The climate change challenge encompasses also the provision of clean water, the disposal of solid waste, and the sewerage system. The shortage of drinking water is another major issue faced on an annual basis by different islands.

Moreover, some Atolls are also prone to severe land and beach erosion, not to mention extreme climatic events, despite ongoing and commendable efforts to mitigate the impact of sea currents and high tides on the coastal line.

Because Maldives is almost completely dependent on tourism for its economic survival (and to a lesser degree on the fisheries, agriculture, and service sectors), environmental



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damages to the reefs (coral bleaching<sup>5</sup>) could severely impact the diving, snorkeling, and fishing activities, resulting in negative consequences on tourism and fisheries. The impact of climate change on fisheries will not only be felt economically, but also culturally because fishing is an integral part of the Maldivian way of life.

In response to these pressing issues, the Government of Maldives is committed to protect the country's fragile environment. The Government is also considering ambitious plans to reclaim land from the sea and to further develop existing lands (e.g., the large island of Hulhumale', which is part of the Administrative Island of Male').

What will be needed is to ascertain the linkages between climate change and population dynamics, in particular with respect to internal and international migration. The demographic increase and population pressure in Male' might be alleviated by the development of the Hulhumale' Island and nearby resorts.

Moreover, one will need to assess the consequences of the population increase around Male' for the economic prospects of the population living on the Atolls.

## Toward a New Conversation on Population and Development

This section examines four possible avenues to enhance population and development policies in Maldives with the view of addressing the three key issues that should be prioritized (see the section *Maldives' Population and Development Challenges* of this analysis).

These issues are the improvement of the youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality, the capturing of the first demographic dividend, and the management of international and internal migration.

To pursue these three goals, this paper proposes four policy pathways, as follows:

- To bring population issues within overall development strategies in Maldives;
- To strengthen the institutional settings to address population issues;
- To expand population and development research; and
- To enhance advocacy on population and development issues.

<sup>5</sup> Coral bleaching has accelerated recently in Maldives because of the climatic phenomenon known as El Niño, which compounds global warming.



## Bringing Population Issues within Overall Development Strategies

Since the early 1980s, the Government of Maldives has crafted a series of National Development Plans (NDPs), which were prepared under the purview of the Ministry of Planning and National Development (MPND). The MPND was also tasked to ensure the coherence of the Sectoral Master Plans (prepared by the line ministries) with the NDPs.

In 2008, the MPND became the Department of National Planning (DNP), under the Ministry of Finance & Treasury (MFT). The DNP was composed of two major branches, namely a Planning Division and a Statistics Division.

In 2014, the Statistics Division morphed into the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which remained under the Ministry of Finance & Treasury (the NBS was in charge of the 2014 Population and Housing Census).

The last national development plan for the Maldives was the *Seventh National Development Plan 2006-2010*, which is known also as the *Strategic Action Plan 2009-2013*. No national development plan has been prepared in the country since then.

Within the national development plans, one important area warrants a closer examination, namely the Population and Development Consolidation Policy, which had been initiated in 1998 but seems to have lost preeminence in recent years.

In addition to the national development plans, the Government of Maldives has prepared a longer-term development plan, which is called the Vision 2020 document (this document is only available in Dhivehi).

The Government has also prepared development planning documents for specific donor's meetings (see for example Government of the Republic of Maldives, 1994b). Moreover, under special circumstances, e.g., the December 2004 tsunami, the Government has occasionally prepared *ad hoc* development and/or recovery plans.

Finally, the political parties in Maldives have also issued planning development plans or concept notes, which are known in Maldives as *Election Manifestos*. These documents outline the electoral campaign program of the party vying for power, along with some broad development planning considerations. In addition, Presidential speeches and addresses may also provide policy clues (see Annex 3).



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## Maldives' National Development Plans

The first national development plan of Maldives covered a three-year period, from 1982 to 1984. Subsequent development plans covered usually periods of 3 years, but some plans covered periods of 4 years and sometimes 5 years.

As mentioned, the last national development plan for the country was the *Seventh National Development Plan 2006-2010* or *Strategic Action Plan 2009-2013* (Government of Maldives, 2007).

After explaining the principles, vision, and goals of the document, the Seventh NDP covered the areas of economic development, spatial development, social development, and governance, before addressing the issues of financing, implementation, and monitoring (Government of Maldives, 2007: V-VI).

Population and development issues were not addressed directly or explicitly in this NDP or in previous NDPs. However, a large section of the Seventh NDP document was devoted explicitly to the population and development consolidation (PDC) program across the 5 regions of the country (Government of Maldives, 2007: 24-29).

## Population and Development Consolidation Policy

The Government of Maldives had initiated a Population and Development Consolidation (PDC) Policy as early as 1998, encouraging voluntary internal migration.

The overall objective of the policy was to maximize the use of public infrastructure (through infrastructure sharing), to save costs on the provision of education and health services, and to gain economies of scale while reducing also social and economic vulnerabilities.

Several methods were adopted to achieve these goals, namely physically connecting the islands through infrastructure (e.g., by building roads or causeways); establishing ferry links between islands on same Atolls; and providing incentives for inhabitants of isolated islands to relocate to larger, more economically viable, and safer islands.

After the 1998 policy was enacted, 17 islands communities requested to be relocated to more economically viable islands. After the 2004 tsunami, such requests increased because of push factors (poor living conditions and safety concerns on small isolated islands).

In addition, the Government designed pull factors, such as the provision of affordable housing and full range of social services; better economic opportunities;



improved transportation; and better infrastructure. Five relatively larger islands were identified to be developed as host Islands, namely R. Dhuvaafaru, A. Dh. Maamigili, Dh. Kudahuvadhuo, Th. Vilufushi, and L. Gan.

Shortly after the 2004 tsunami, the Government designed – under the 2005 *National Recovery and Reconstruction Plan* – a specific project (Project HISL 001 – Phase 1) entitled *Development of Host Islands for relocation from vulnerable islands* (Republic of Maldives, 2005a: 97-99).

The goal of this project was to support the national PDC Policy. The rationale for this USD 15 million effort was to help small island inhabitants to overcome a series of specific economic development handicaps such as island smallness and remoteness, geographical dispersion, vulnerability to natural disasters, fragility of ecosystems, constraints on transport and communication, highly limited internal market, and lack of natural resources.

Another consideration was to lower the overhead or unit costs in the production and provision of goods and services through increasing the population on selected growth centers. Again, the program was designed as a voluntary resettlement program, along with a mechanism of appropriate incentives.

Today, it seems that the PDC Policy does not muster the same level of attention as it did in the past. The 2008 *Election Manifesto* put less emphasis on population and development consolidation, and prioritized transportation and connectivity among atoll-islands instead (see The Government of Maldives, 2009).

However, the current Government wants to develop the Administrative Island of Male', which comprises six wards and the Industrial Island of Hulhule where the international airport is located. In particular, the Government wants to develop the ward of Hulhumale'.

The Government has launched also the construction of a bridge between Male' and the industrial island of Hulhule (this island is linked to Hulhumale' by a road). Plans to expand the airport have also been prepared, which are needed for the growth of the tourism industry.

The ultimate goal of this ambitious policy could be to relocate possibly 100,000 people in Hulhumale'. This would mean that about two-thirds of the total population of Maldives could eventually be relocated on a few islands (including Villingili) in the Administrative Island of Male'.

In addition, the Government of Maldives has established a list of growth centers across the country, from North to South, as follows:

- Haa Alifu Atoll, also known as Northern Thiladhunmathi Atoll (HA);
- Faafu Atoll, also known as Northern Nilandhe Atoll (F) or Nilandhe Atholhu Uthuruburi;
- Fuvahmulah Atoll, under administrative division of Gnaviyani Atoll (Gn) or Nyaviyani Atoll; and
- Addu Atoll or Addu City (S) Administrative Island, also previously known as Seenu Atoll.



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Investments in these Atolls will serve as migratory pull factors; for example, a deep water harbor is being planned in Haa Alifu Atoll. It is expected that such pull factors, as well as push factors, would lead more inhabitants of other islands to request their relocation in these growth centers.

## Ad hoc Development and/or Recovery Plans

In March 2005, the Government issued a *National Recovery and Reconstruction Plan* after the tsunami, which occurred on December 26, 2004. This catastrophe was the worst natural disaster in the nation's history. The tsunami washed over the entire country claiming 82 lives, leaving 26 people missing, and making 15,000 people homeless and displaced. An estimated 4,000 buildings were also damaged and/or destroyed (among these buildings, it is estimated that 2,000 needed complete reconstruction).

Although Maldives are located at 2,000 kilometers from the epicenter of the earthquake that created the tsunami, the country – composed of low-lying atoll-islands less than 2 meters above sea-level – suffered greatly from waves that were up to 3 meters high.

Decades of hard-won developmental efforts have been annihilated in just a few hours, not even taking into account the aftermath of the catastrophe (Republic of Maldives, 2005a: i).

This demonstrates the vulnerability of the country to climatic catastrophes and to climate change more generally, which may be the paramount issue that Maldives will need to face in future decades.

After the recovery and reconstruction plan put into place to address the damages caused by the 2004 tsunami, the Government of Maldives issued also a *Strategic Economic Plan or SEP* (Republic of Maldives, 2005b).

The goal of this ambitious effort was to identify and mitigate the factors compounding the volatility and vulnerability of Maldives' economy. The SEP highlighted 3 traditional economic clusters, namely tourism, fisheries, and agriculture, whose expansion would provide more stability to the economy and spin off new growth clusters.

The new growth clusters were identified as being: Port and Logistics Services, Information and Communication Technology, and Offshore Banking and Financial Centre. The supporting policies to make this happen were deemed to be human resources development, institutional capacity building, and strengthening internal and regional relationships with new trade and investments partners (Republic of Maldives, 2005b: 6-7).

Finally, broad socioeconomic development guidance for Maldives can be found in the *Election Manifestos*, which are prepared during election time by the various political parties vying for power, as well as in Presidential speeches and addresses (see Annex 3).



## Strengthening the Institutional Settings to Address Population Issues

The 2004 Population Policy of the Maldives laid out the institutional arrangements needed for the implementation of the population policy (Republic of Maldives, 2004: 19-21).

The Government established an Inter-departmental Population Programme Coordination Committee (PPCC), headed by the Minister of Planning and National Development (MPND).

At the Atoll level, similar inter-sectoral committees were also established, namely the Atoll Population Committee (APC), which were to be chaired by the Atoll Chief. Finally, the Population Programme Coordination Unit (PPCU) at the MPND was tasked with the population policy formulation and coordination (Republic of Maldives, 2004: 19).

The Population Section, a department under the Ministry of Planning and National Development, was to serve as the Secretariat of the PPCC. Its role was to carry out the necessary analyses on population and development, including the preparation of population projections, and to relay this information to the PPCC and the APCs.

It was also decided that the members of the PPCC would include representatives of the sectoral or line ministries (Health, Education, Atolls Administration, Gender, Youth and Sports, etc.) (Republic of Maldives, 2004: 19-20).

As mentioned, one of the overall objectives of the 2004 Population Policy was to create the synergies between the various sectoral interventions, in order to achieve the various goals of the policy (see the section *Maldives' Population and Social Policies* of this booklet).

Finally, the APCs were designed to include sectoral managers (from the line ministries) at the Atoll and atoll-island levels. Decisions regarding the implementation of the population policy had to be consistent with the Atoll development plans, also developed under the chairmanship of the Atoll Chief (Republic of Maldives, 2004: 20).

Several changes occurred since the adoption of the 2004 Population Policy. In November 2008, the Ministry of Planning and National Development (MPND) was changed to the Department of National Planning (DNP), which is run under the Ministry of Finance & Treasury (see <http://planning.gov.mv/en/content/view/32/44/>). Among its various functions, the DNP must:

- Formulate policies and regulations on national statistics and coordinate statistical data collection operations in Maldives;
- Conduct population and housing census; compile national accounts; and collect, compile, and publish national statistics;
- Formulate national population policies, conduct population research, and coordinate population projects; and
- Formulate policies on spatial distribution of population and identify locations for population and economic centers.

However, the Department of National Planning (DNP) does not appear today to be the pivotal institution to formulate and implement population and development policies in Maldives.

Assuming that population and development issues come to the attention of the Maldivian leadership, it seems that the decision-making is done at the President's



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Office, under its Economic and Youth Council and its Social Council. Therefore, it appears crucial to reach out to the policymakers in these two platforms.

## Expanding Population and Development Research

Several population and development issues as well as reproductive health issues warrant a more thorough investigation.

First of all, one will need to complete *secondary analyses of the 2014 Census results*. The National Bureau of Statistics has already issued several important publications, presenting the 2014 Population and Housing Census data on the Population and Households, as well as the migration, education, employment, nuptiality and fertility patterns, and housing and household characteristics (Republic of Maldives, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2015f & 2016).

Another publication will also present the *new population projections* (see below) and other publications could present additional analyses, for instance on specific segments of the population of Maldives, including the school-age population, the youth, and the elderly.

Second, it is necessary to prepare *new population projections* (this is currently being undertaken by the National Bureau of Statistics, with the assistance of a UNFPA Consultant). Population projections will need to be done on a regular basis (ideally, every two years) and will need to include the population of foreigners.

As it appears difficult to monitor the movements of foreigners, one approach would be to use the sex and age structure of foreigners as captured in the 2014 Census, and to just increase it by a ratio (i.e., a percentage of increase every year).

For the Resident Maldivian population, however, one could use the classic method of cohort-component population projection. Thereafter, the two sub-populations could be added up in order to obtain the total projection resident population of Maldives by age and sex.

Such an approach would enable NBS to update the population projections on a regular basis. It will be also important to cross-check Census and other demographic data with data originating from other sources, essentially those collected by the Immigration authorities and the civil registration system.

This will be needed to estimate the population of foreigners more accurately. Finally, for the 20 Atolls and 188 inhabited islands of Maldives, one could use a simple ratio technique to project future populations. This could be done by using Census data of past decades, and extrapolating them into the future (Maldives Census records and United Nations Population Fund, 2015).

However, such an extrapolation should be informed by additional information to be gleaned on the economic prospects of each Atoll and Administrative Island ( , opening of guest-houses and/or other economic activities).

Third, the *capturing of the first demographic dividend* will require more demographic and economic analysis, as well as the design of new policies to foster human capital development (e.g., education and health), and other related policies such as macro-economic interventions.

In this respect, the policy framework provided by Gribble and Bremner (2012) is most useful, because it stresses the importance of a proper enabling environment (economic, health, education, and governance dimensions) that links the changing population structure to the demographic dividend itself.

In addition, several models are available to project the demographic dividend. The DemDiv model has been used successfully in countries, like Ethiopia, that may be reaching soon their demographic window of opportunity (Admassie et al., 2015; Moreland, 2015).

In the case of Maldives, however, the country has already entered its demographic window of opportunity. Therefore, it might be useful to analyze the demographic evolution of the country during the past 20 years in order to understand when exactly Maldives reached the demographic window of opportunity.

In addition, modelling the demographic dividend in Maldives would enable to analyze two different scenarios: first, the economic growth and second, the economic growth plus education improvements and expanded family planning programs (Admassie et al., 2015: 13-16).

Fourth, it will be necessary also to explore the *linkages between population, poverty, and inequality*. The recent World Bank Group report *Demographic Goals in an Era of Demographic Change* (World Bank Group, 2016) establishes the linkages between demographic changes and the development twin goals of reducing poverty levels and achieving shared prosperity (i.e., improving the living conditions of the people in the two lower wealth quintiles).

Fifth, additional research is also needed in the area of *reproductive health*. With respect to induced abortion, it would be useful to conduct an analysis of the proximate determinants of fertility (the behavioral and biological determinants of fertility), by using the Bongaarts model.

It would also be necessary to conduct a survey on the prevalence of abortion in Maldives. In addition, some qualitative analyses might throw additional light on the phenomenon of induced abortion. The issue of induced abortion might be related to the imbalance that has been observed in the sex ratio at birth and this would also warrant more analysis.

Sixth, and last but not least, one will need to explore the *nexus between population and climate change*. In this respect, the Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) framework might be useful.

The PHE approach consists of “simultaneously (improving) access to primary health care services, particularly family planning and reproductive health, while also helping communities conserve the critical ecosystems and natural resources upon which they depend” (Yavinsky et al., 2015: 3). It would be useful to assess the feasibility of such an approach in Maldives.



## Enhancing Advocacy on Population and Development Issues

“Advocacy encompasses activities by individuals and/or groups with the view of influencing policymakers about policies and, hopefully, mobilizing adequate funding for interventions and programs” (May, 2012: 225-226).

Advocacy activities use a variety of tools, such as public speech, media campaigns, lobbying, analytical work, models, brochures, and pamphlets with the view of informing and convincing leaders, policymakers, and particular constituencies. Policy dialogue implies high level discussions with key stakeholders, and may be conducted within a country, for instance by policy “champions” trying to convince leaders, policymakers, and/or the general public.

Regarding data analysis and dissemination, major efforts have been carried out by the Government of Maldives, with support from UNFPA and other donors. The first publications of the 2014 Population and Housing Census are well crafted and presented in an attractive format (Republic of Maldives, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2015f & 2016).

Other publications by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), such as the *Statistical Yearbook* series (Republic of Maldives, 2015g), are landmark productions in Maldives. They are well disseminated and widely used.

However, it appears that more could be done to translate the available information on population and development into actionable policies. Moreover, as mentioned, it would be most useful to mesh the available information with the overall development policies of Maldives. This would inform the country development policies with key demographic data and analyses. It would also enhance the ongoing policy dialogue on population and development issues.

The policy tools to achieve these goals are readily available. One could prepare brochures, policy briefs, posters, wallcharts, blogs, etc., in printed and/or electronic format. In this respect, the poster that was recently released by UNFPA (Maldives Census records and United Nations Population Fund, 2015) is most useful.

In addition, one could also prepare media production, clips, podcasts, and population and development models, like the ENGAGE model developed by the Population Reference Bureau. Good visual support to key population and development messages is always most effective. One should take advantage of the digital revolution, to which Maldives is taking part, to further disseminate the results of the analyses on population and development issues.

More specifically, such policy tools could be prepared in three major areas, as follows:

- Policy briefs and material on the Youth's Human Capital;
- Policy briefs and brochures on the reproductive health and gender equality agendas; and
- Dissemination of material on the first demographic dividend.





Photo credit: Eagan Badeeu for UNFPA Maldives

## Conclusions

As it has been highlighted in this analysis, Maldives must address three population and development challenges, namely the improvement of the youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality, the capturing of a potential first demographic dividend, and the management of internal and international migration. To date, commendable efforts have been carried out in these areas by the Government of Maldives, with the support of its development partners.

Nonetheless, it appears that the 2004 population policy is outdated and that no National Development Plan (NDP) has been prepared since 2007. The formulation of public policies appears to be carried out mostly through the process known in Maldives as the *Election Manifestos*.

Presidential speeches and addresses also provide policy clues. Moreover, public population and development policies aimed at addressing the three issues that have been identified (and that are interrelated) would benefit from a closer coordination with the overall socioeconomic development policies of the country.

In addition to policies needed to tackle each of the three challenges, interventions will be necessary also to address the cross-cutting issues between these challenges, including the mitigation of the effects of climate change.

All these efforts should lead toward a new conversation on population and development issues in Maldives, which would help enhancing youth's human capital and gender equality, capturing the first demographic dividend, and managing national and international migration.

To chart the way forward and strengthen the existing public policies, it is proposed to adopt four specific policy pathways with the view of enhancing population and development policies of Maldives, as follows:

- Bring Population Issues within Overall Development Strategies;
- Strengthen the Institutional Settings to Address Population Issues;
- Expand Population and Development Research; and
- Enhance Advocacy on Population and Development Issues.

## Annex 1: Scope of Work of Consultancy

Inspired by relevant sections of the UNFPA Population Situation Analysis (PSA) methodology, the Consultant was required to analyze the 2014 Census and other data, and review international best policy practices against the salient findings. The Consultant worked with staff at the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The Consultant was required to assess relevant national policies, to facilitate a seminar based on the draft paper for feedback, and to present findings to peers (steering committee) and policy makers.

The population dynamics were to be analyzed along gender disaggregated data, highlighting generational differences in conjunction with at least the following themes:

- Long-term macro policy consequences and related policy options;
- National demographic transition. Changes in fertility, mortality and both internal and international migration, dependency structure and their impact on population dynamics and poverty, with differences between Male' and the Atolls and between the different socio-economic groups;
- Demographic dividend window and what is needed (policies) to take advantage of it;
- Migration (internal and international) and spatial distribution of population with a special focus on foreign population and their living conditions;
- Assessment of population living in smaller and larger islands to provide policy options on development and population consolidation aspects. Spatial distribution of population, the difference between Male' and Atolls, population density, household size and size of living space, island size as well as other characteristics, including analysis of the implication of transportation system, communication, access to services (e.g., education, health, sewerage, infrastructure, transportation, water, waste, jobs and economic situation of islands); and
- Maldives policy of population consolidation, the assumption behind population consolidation and its alternatives given current situation and development of transportation and communication.

## Annex 2: Maldives 2014 Population and Housing Census

### 2014 Census Questionnaire

The *Shaviyani Form: Information on Households and Individuals* (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014) collected first the household information (under the heading Population and Housing Information), with the questions referring to the area used by the household only.

Then, under the heading Person Identification, the form listed questions about the Individual(s). The Person Identification schedule included first general questions and thereafter specific questions on migration, education, employment, elderly people, as well as two indirect estimation questions on fertility.

### 2014 Census Enumeration Method

The 2014 Population and Housing Census, which was carried out in September 20-30,

2014, used a *de facto* count, enumerating all persons physically present in the country at the time of the Census, which is also called the “Census reference period”.

The *de facto* approach was first introduced in the Maldives 1977 Census and had been used in subsequent population and housing censuses, carried out in 1990, 2000, and 2006. However, in 2014, the *de facto* approach was implemented more thoroughly, with the purpose of fully integrating foreigners in canvassing the Census questionnaire. As a result, the 2014 Census count included resident Maldivians, foreigners, and non-resident Maldivians.

Although the strict implementation of the *de facto* method of enumeration makes the results of the 2014 Census less comparable with those of the 2006 Census, the *de facto* approach enables to capture the foreigners as well as the non-resident Maldivians present in the country at the time of the Census enumeration.

The *de facto* method is also useful to assess the actual population residing in the country, to obtain the age and sex distribution of the foreigners (which is very different from the age and sex distribution of resident Maldivians), and to get some information on the international migration patterns.

### Publication of the 2014 Census Results

In November 2014, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Male’ issued the Preliminary Results of the 2014 Population and Housing Census (Republic of Maldives, 2014c).

The 23 tables of this report focused on the population of the resident Maldivians (the Maldivians who have lived or intend to reside in Maldives for 1 year or more) and presented aggregated results from the 2006 and 2014 censuses.

The first table of these Preliminary Results covered the Maldivian population, sex ratio, and population growth rate by locality. The second table presented the population, sex ratio, and population distribution in 2006 and 2014. All the subsequent tables from this batch presented the population, sex ratio, and annual population growth for Male’ and by Atolls (for the 20 groups of atoll-islands, which are called Administrative Islands or administrative divisions).

The capital Male’ and the islands in its vicinity are also an Administrative Island. The Administrative Island of Male’ comprises six wards, namely the four wards of Male’ proper and the two wards of Hulhumale’ and Villingili.

The industrial island of Hulhule, where the international airport is located, also belongs to the Administrative Island of Male’. The non-Administrative Islands include tourist Resorts, Industrial islands, and Islands used for other purposes.

In 2015, the National Bureau of Statistics in Male’ issued another set of 2014 Census tables, which were made available electronically in Excel format. These tables focused also on the resident Maldivian component of the country’s total population and provided a breakdown of the resident Maldivian population by five-year age groups and by administrative divisions. The NBS also released a table of the total resident population of Maldives by single year and sex.

In October 2015, the NBS issued the first report of the final results of the 2014 Census (Republic of Maldives, 2015b). This report includes the batch of tables that had been made available earlier in 2015 in Excel (see <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/census-2014/>). The NBS also issued a report on Migration (Republic of Maldives, 2015c). The NBS has since released the Education report, the Employment report, the Nuptiality & Fertility report, and the Housing and Household Characteristics report (see Republic of Maldives, 2015d, 2015e, 2015f & 2016).

## Annex 3: Election Manifestos and Presidential Speeches

**E**lection Manifestos are electoral campaign pledges, but they also provide an overall framework for the work to be accomplished by the administration of the President to be elected or the newly appointed President.

As such, *Elections Manifestos* do cover a vast array of socioeconomic and developmental issues. They could be seen as a hybrid between an electoral program and a socioeconomic development planning Concept Note. The President of the Republic of Maldives is elected by the People’s Majlis (i.e., the Parliament). The Parliament 85 directly elected members have a term of five years (see also Turner, 2013: 828).

The latest *Election Manifesto* was issued in 2013 by the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM). The PPM, which was formed in 2011, became the ruling party of Maldives on November 17, 2013, when its candidate Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom won the 2013 Maldivian Presidential Election after defeating Mohamed Nasheed, the former President and the leader of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP).

The PPM *Manifesto* 2013 covered 12 sectors and issues, including agriculture, education, energy, fisheries, gender, healthcare, housing, security, social protection, infrastructure, tourism, and transportation. In addition, the PPM *Manifesto* 2013 covered also the issues of nationality and Islam (see Progressive Party of Maldives, 2013).

The scope of the PPM *Manifesto* 2013 was very broad. A closer examination of its 12 briefs provides a lot of insights into Maldives socioeconomic and developmental challenges. Some briefs were very detailed and elaborated, like the one on Universal Healthcare, which contained 21 goals (all assorted with detailed solutions).

For example, the health brief paid special attention to maternal healthcare for pregnant women in every island. One of the main challenge of Maldives’ health sector is to provide medical services on every of the 187 inhabited island (not including Male’).

This means not only to train doctors (General Practitioners or GP) and midwives but also, and more importantly, to deploy them on all islands (it should be noted that many physicians residing outside Male’ are foreigners).

As it has been mentioned already, the dispersal of the Maldivian population – close to a quarter of a million people spread over 187 inhabited islands outside Male’ – is a major constraint to make basic health services readily accessible.

The geographical dispersion of the population also increases significantly the unit costs of providing health services, as well as providing education services. The health brief also covered the elderly, which is an important social and economic dimension as the country is expected to be affected inexorably by population ageing.

The PPM *Manifesto* 2013 also elaborated on the education sector, which was viewed as an effective lever to achieve a modern society.

In this respect, the goal was to align the offer of education and the curricula to the needs of the economic transformation of the country. The economic empowerment of women was covered in the brief on gender, entitled *Women’s True Participation: Definitive Path to Successful Development*. Last but not least, the briefs presented in the PPM *Manifesto* 2013 addressed also the issues of energy, housing, and transportation, which are crucial to foster economic growth in the tourism, fisheries, agriculture, and service sectors.

An *Election Manifesto* had also been issued in 2008 by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which had been in power previously. Later, this *Election Manifesto* was recrafted and presented in a much more elaborate format, similar to a full-fledged national development plan (The Government of Maldives, 2009).



In addition to Election *Manifestos*, Presidential speeches and addresses provide also some insights into what the policy priorities are in Maldives. These contributions can be illustrated with two examples.

President Abdulla Yameen addressed the nation on January 21, 2016 (President of the Republic of Maldives, 2016a) and his speech provided several policy directions<sup>6</sup>. Among the various themes of the speech, President Yameen mentioned his commitment to cater to the needs of the youth.

In order to empower young men and young women in all fields, the Government has introduced the GETSET program (a system of loans to encourage youth entrepreneurship) as well as loans to encourage youth participation in farming (where relatively less young people are engaged than in fishing).

Other key dimensions of the priority focus on the youth are the improvement of the sport infrastructure, a program to rehabilitate young drug users, the creation of higher education opportunities for some 4,500 students, and the strengthening of health services for the youth (health screening and access to health specialists).

President Yameen Abdul Gayyoom also mentioned an amendment that had been brought to the 2000 Family Act, namely that a woman would receive a share of her husband's business when the marriage breaks apart (Republic of Maldives, 2000).

In another speech, delivered at the People's Majlis (the Parliament) on February 4, 2016, President Abdulla Yameen presented a broad overview of his government's program and achievements (President of the Republic of Maldives, 2016b).

In this speech, the President touched on virtually all aspects and all sectors of development in Maldives, including *inter alia* foreign affairs, justice, tourism, water, transportation, agriculture, fisheries, health, education, and social protection. During his address, the President again stressed the importance of empowering the youth and the women.

## Annex 4: The Process of Developing this Paper

**T**he Terms of References for this analysis were designed by the UNFPA Maldives Country Office and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (Ref.: MDV-ToR/2015/15, prepared on October 5, 2015; see Annex 1 for Scope of Work of Consultancy).

The Inception Report outlining the work plan and methodology, including the expected Table of Contents of the Final Report was submitted to the UNFPA Maldives Country Office on December 4, 2015 and revised on December 11, 2015, including comments from the Government of Maldives and the UNFPA Maldives Country Office.

A preliminary draft of the Main Paper for review, discussion, and feedback was submitted on December 29, 2015. The draft paper was presented in Male' during a mission to Maldives (January 10-21, 2016) by the International Consultant.

A half-day Seminar with the stakeholders was convened by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Male' on January 19, 2016 and was attended by technical staff as well as policymakers.

This Seminar, based on the preliminary draft of the main paper, presented the key findings to peers and policymakers and elicited their feedback. The NBS commented on the draft paper, which has been modified accordingly and updated with the most recent data and literature. This work has been finalized on June 15, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that most Presidential speeches are delivered in Dhivehi, and that not all Presidential addresses are available in English (UNFPA, Personal communication).

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**John F. May**

John F. May, a US and Belgian national, is a specialist in population policies. He is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Population Reference Bureau (Washington, DC) and Adjunct Professor of Demography at Georgetown University. He was a Lead Demographer at the World Bank Group for 15 years and has worked for the United Nations as well as for the US consulting firm Futures Group International. He has also worked for many international agencies around the world, including the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population.

He earned a BA in Modern History and a MA in Demography from the Catholic University of Louvain, and received his Doctorate in Demography *Summa cum laude* from the University of Paris-V (Sorbonne). His book *World Population Policies: Their Origin, Evolution, and Impact* (Springer, 2012) received the Population Institute 2012 Global Media Award for best book on population. In 2013, he was elected an Associate-Member of the Royal Academy of Belgium.

He can be contacted at:

PRB ([www.prb.org/PRBData](http://www.prb.org/PRBData))

Population Reference Bureau

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Suite 520

Washington, DC 20009

202 939 5482 Phone

202 328 3937 Fax

Email: [jmay@prb.org](mailto:jmay@prb.org)



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UNFPA Maldives Country Office  
3rd Floor, Shinetree Building,  
Boduthakurufaanu Magu, Maafanu,  
Male' 20184, Republic of Maldives  
[maldives.office@unfpa.org](mailto:maldives.office@unfpa.org)  
<http://maldives.unfpa.org>

National Bureau of Statistics  
Ministry of Finance and Treasury,  
Ameenee Magu,  
Male', 20125, Rep. of Maldives  
[info@stats.gov.mv](mailto:info@stats.gov.mv)  
[www.statisticsmaldives.gov.mv](http://www.statisticsmaldives.gov.mv)

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