* **Population 6.492 million (49.86% female)[[1]](#endnote-1)**
* **Average household size: 5.3 persons/HH[[2]](#endnote-2)**
* **Female headed households: 13.2% of the households[[3]](#endnote-3)**
* **Literacy Rates 15-24 years: 88% female, 91% male[[4]](#endnote-4)**
* **Infant Mortality rates: 57 per 1000 live births[[5]](#endnote-5)**
* **Rate of Domestic Violence: 30.3% (physical, sexual, and emotional violence against women > 15 years)[[6]](#endnote-6)**

# Gender in Brief

Lao PDR is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. Officially it hosts 49 ethnicities that fall under four broad language families: the Lao-Tai, the Mon Khmer, the Hmong-Mien and the Chine-Tibet[[7]](#endnote-7). This wealth of cultures, traditions and perceptions influences societal norms, activities, and relations with others, directly impacting gender roles and relations. Within ethnic minority groups, these gender relations may differ. For example, within the matriarchal Lao-Tai group, land is passed on to the daughter while this is not the case within the minority ethnic groups. Similarly, lowland women from among the Lao-Tai majority group tend to control household finances, while men have that responsibility within the various ethnic minority groups. Ethnically based cultural differences also create gender-specific patterns with regard to utilization of social services (such as education and health), and in the real and perceived utility and opportunity costs of the services offered.

**Traditional roles and responsibilities** of women, men, boys and girls differ. A CARE time-use study of the LANGOCA[[8]](#endnote-8) project in Sekong province showed that women and girls perform approximately 70-80% of all tasks (household and food production). The remaining 20-30% of the tasks are done together with male family members. During the wet season, there is a heavy workload for both women and men, and many tasks are shared and overlap. Tasks done by men include building houses, cutting trees, fishing, and hunting but these are becoming less frequently needed. Many tasks such as collecting water, rice hulling, planting, weeding, harvesting and childcare are done by women. Men and women share agricultural work; but women have a significantly heavier workload than men. This division of labour particularly affects ethnic women and girls in remote areas, who bear the majority of the workload.

**Employment and income:** Income from agriculture is considered the most important source of income for the majority of people in Laos with 72% of the workforce employed in this industry. Throughout Laos, the most common status of employment for women is as unpaid family workers, making up 35.1% of female jobs in urban areas, 69.9% in rural areas, and 83.5% in rural areas without access to road.[[9]](#endnote-9) Women in Laos dominate industries related to Accommodation and food service activities (66.9), Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles (65.1), Human health and social work activities (60.1), and Manufacturing (59.4). Men dominated industries are Transportation and storage (90.9), Electricity, gas and air-conditioning supply (82.2), and Public administration and defence, compulsory social security (78)[[10]](#endnote-10). In urban areas, the majority of women secure informal sector income through owning small businesses, mainly in retail, textiles, and guesthouses. In the formal sector, it is rare for women to possess the same educational and work qualifications as their male counterparts. Women are rarely found in management or decision-making positions, with 85% of women making up the workforce in the textile and garment industry as production workers. Meanwhile, migration is increasingly becoming an option for women and their children; this however increases their vulnerabilities, particularly for the children. Women’s access to land tenancy, extension services, credit and bank loans are extremely limited.

**Education and literacy:** In 2015 the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and above was 84.7% but with a large gender gap, with female literacy at 79.4% against a male literacy at 90%. There is also a large difference between the literacy in urban areas (male 96% and female 91%), the literacy in rural areas (male 87% and female 74%) and the literacy in rural areas without access to road (male 81% and female 62%). Furthermore, the lowest number of both male and female literacy is in the northern part of Laos: Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Bokeo, and Oudonmxay. In 2015 the number of persons in the aged group 25-59 who had completed at least one year of higher education was 12%, with female making up 15.3% and male only 8.8%.[[11]](#endnote-11)

**Gender equality, legislation and representation:** The Government of Laos (GoL) has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality and recognizes the central role of women in the national and household economy. Lao PDR has the second highest proportion of women in lower houses of parliament in the region. The principle of equality is enshrined in Lao’s laws. Notably, the Lao Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women in socio-economic, political, socio-cultural and family affairs. The Labour Law (2013[[12]](#endnote-12)) requires non-discrimination in employment and equal pay for work of equal quantity, quality, and value; the Land Law states that land acquired by a couple is required to be issued jointly. However, even with these laws in place, women remain under-represented in provincial and district authorities, and village level committees are almost entirely male. Prevailing cultural values tend to disadvantage women in terms of their participation in politics and decision-making processes.

**Gender-based and domestic violence:** Lao PDR is a signatory to a number of international conventions on the rights of women and children, and has national laws to prevent Gender Based Violence (GBV). Nevertheless, a high rate of women report having experienced emotional violence, physical violence, and sexual violence from their husbands[[13]](#endnote-13). A study for 2014 recorded that 30.3% of the ever-partnered women reported to have experienced at least one of these three types of violence.[[14]](#endnote-14) A survey from 2012 found that 58% of women and 49% of men felt that violence against women was justified. This reflects the social values, norm, and perceptions of gender in Laos. Outside of the household, female sex workers are particularly at risk of sexual and other forms of violence. A study by CARE found that women involved in sex work in the Vientiane area encountered a high level of violence and abuse by clients, managers and authorities and – due to their illegal status – received limited or no legal protection or support. The 2011 Lao Social Indicator Survey[[15]](#endnote-15) found that 76% of Lao children aged 2-14 had been subject to at least one form of psychological aggression or physical punishment from an adult in their household. Of these, 77% are boys and 74% are girls. The percentage of children experiencing violence remains high across all education levels of household heads and wealth categories.

**Gender in Emergencies:** Lao PDR is a non-conflict country but has experienced localized natural disasters mainly floods and drought. Women in Laos traditionally work hard in their normal life to serve the families (see section on *traditional roles and responsibilities*). When disasters happen women will take on more responsibilities in order to take care of their families. These tasks include looking for food and drinking water and taking care of elderly people and people with disabilities in the families. The increased workload in emergencies as well as women not being able to access the basic needs and services can contribute to women feeling stressed. Most people are not aware that emergencies affect women, men, boys, girls, elderly, and disable people differently, and in times of emergency women´s needs are often not included into the response plan. A study by Oxfam after typhoon *Ketasna’[[16]](#endnote-16)* showed that needs assessments often were conducted while the women were working in the field. For the future improvement, considering women involvement in every state of the consultation and response process as well as building their capacity to cope with natural disaster and man-made disaster is the key priority.

1. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015*  [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015*  [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015*  [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015*  [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015* [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. NCAW 2015, *Summary Report A Study on Violent Against Women in Lao PDR*, published by National Commission for the Advancement of Women, in Lao PDR, First printed in 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Chamberlain, James, *et al.*, 1996, *Indigenous Peoples Profile. Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Part One*, Vientiane: CARE International for the World Bank [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Bartlett, Andrew 2014, *Program Outcomes Research Report – A study carried out as part of the final evaluation of the Laos-Australia NGO Cooperation Agreement (LANGOCA) Program,* Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015* [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015* [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Lao Statistic Bureau 2015, *Results of The 4th Population and Housing Census 2015* [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Lao PDR 2013, *Labour Law (Amended)*, National Assebly, No. 43/NA, Vientiane Capital, 24 December 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Gender and Development Group (GDG), 2003 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. NCAW 2015, *“Summary Report, A Study on Violence against Women in Lao PDR – Lao National Survey on Women´s Health and Life Experiences 2014”* NCAW, UNFPA, UN Women, and World Health Organization, 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ministry of Health and Lao Statistics Bureau 2012, *Lao Social Indicator Survey 2011-12,* Vientiane, Lao PDR [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Oxfam, *Gender Review of Typhoon Ketsana Emergency Response Lao PDR,* Oxfam Australia, February 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)