* **Population Sex Disaggregation: 50.7% male to 49.3% female[[1]](#endnote-1)**
* **Population Age Disaggregation: <5yrs 13%; 5-19yrs 38%; 20-49yrs 36%; >65yrs 4%[[2]](#endnote-2)**
* **Average household size: 5.7[[3]](#endnote-3)**
* **Female headed households: 16%[[4]](#endnote-4)**
* **Literacy Rates for Tetum (national language) aged 15 above: male 67.24%; female 58.9%[[5]](#endnote-5)**
* **Infant Mortality rates: 30 per 1000 live births** [[6]](#endnote-6) (indicative)\*
* **Maternal Mortality rate: 557 per 1000 live births [[7]](#endnote-7)**
* **Rate of Domestic Violence: 38% (physical violence against women aged 15-49) and 34% (physical and sexual violence by husband)[[8]](#endnote-8)**
* **Proportion of the population with a disability: 3.2%, [[9]](#endnote-9)51% are men and 49% are women**

# Gender in Brief

Timor-Leste recently gained independence in 2002 after a long struggle of colonization from Portugal and Indonesia. The country occupies half of Timor Island with a total of 1.1 million people in 13 municipalities, 67 administrative posts, 442 sucos (villages) and more than 2,225 sub-villages (aldeia). There are two national languages (Tetun and Portuguese) and some 18 other languages spoken. Ninety per cent of Timorese are Catholic, and minorities are Protestant, Muslim and Animist. Majority of the population is Malay-Polynesian and Papua origin; and Chinese, Arabs and Europeans make up the minorities. Poverty is a long-standing challenge for Timor-Leste. More than half the population live below the poverty line, with 76 percent of the poor living in rural areas mostly engaged in subsistence farming livelihoods. Thirty-seven percent of rural households and 22 percent of urban households live in extreme poverty. Female headed households are poorer than male headed households[[10]](#endnote-10). Masculinity and femininity in Timor-Leste are in transition. Timorese men are expected to fulfil traditional obligations but are not able to reap the benefits of the old system (respect, sense of belonging, identity), as traditional social structures either no longer exist or are not accessible due to rural to urban migration[[11]](#endnote-11). These tensions around Timorese masculinity – frustration and social jealousy post-independence – can lead young men to enter martial arts and ritual arts gangs as they seek belonging and identity. Violence (public and domestic) is a key part of young men’s efforts to reinforce gender hierarchies, creating a problematic relationship between violence and masculinity[[12]](#endnote-12). On the other hand, Timorese women want to contribute to their country’s development. Many were active in the resistance movement during the Indonesian occupation but have been expected to return to their traditional gendered roles post-independence.

**Gender Roles and Responsibilities**: Timor-Leste is a context with significant gender inequality. Timorese society assigns strict gender roles for men and women that often lead to discriminatory practices against women. Timorese women and girls are socialised to be submissive resulting in ‘shyness’ and a sense of shame if they speak out. This ‘shyness’ is a product of social norms that expect women to stay home and be silent, and reflects ‘hidden forms of power and exclusion.’[[13]](#endnote-13) Work is strongly gendered in Timor-Leste. Men are responsible for work that is considered more labour intensive, such as work in the rice fields, raising livestock and opening new gardens. Women are responsible for field activities considered less heavy such as planting, weeding and selling produce, as well as reproductive/domestic work; household chores and caring work. Girls and boys are socialised into these gender roles from a young age. Culturally, women manage the daily household work and budget while men are expected to be the household providers. Evidence suggests that in Timor-Leste, wives and husbands make some household decisions together. Women contribute to decisions about how their and their husbands’ earnings will be used, household purchases and their own healthcare[[14]](#endnote-14). While women *participate* in household decision-making it appears that decision-making power ultimately rests with men, particularly in relation to customary decisions.

**Education and Economic Empowerment*:*** Women’s burden of productive and reproductive work means that they often lack time to participate in additional opportunities outside of the home. This translates to statistics on labour force participation which includes 56 per cent of men but only 27 per cent of women[[15]](#endnote-15). Women generally earn less than men and are less likely to receive cash for their work. More men migrate to cities for work, as seen in the difference in urban-rural sex ratio and to Korea, Australia and Europe to work as seasonal farm workers, and in fisheries and factories[[16]](#endnote-16). While some services exist, women in Timor-Leste have limited access to the knowledge and resources needed to effectively control productive assets, such as micro-credit, training, bank facilities, and productive resources such as land, marketing facilities and information. Women’s access to and control over arguably the most valuable asset – land – is not equal to men’s. The Article 54 of the constitution guarantees equal rights to women and men to own property, and the recently approved Land Law guarantees the rights of women and recognizes the equality of land ownership. However, traditionally land is owned by and named to men and in reality the ownership of assets, especially family assets, are attributed to men who are believed to be the successor to the family. Access to education for boys and girls is roughly equal at primary level though not all children access primary education, let alone progress to secondary. More boys (47.7%) are in school than girls (39.4)[[17]](#endnote-17). Economic necessity within the household seems to be more important than sex in terms of children’s attendance at school with boys and girls both having to drop out of school to assist in the household economy. However, most parents who are experiencing economic problems, will give priority to boys in terms of access to school, especially to move on to higher education. Historical inequalities in access to education can be seen in the adult literacy rate with 40% of women illiterate in Tetun (one of two official languages) compared to 59% of men[[18]](#endnote-18).

**Participation and Policy:** Since the 2012 election, Timor ranks 16th globally for women’s representation in parliament, with 38.5% female parliamentarians, reflecting the success of the quota system for women. Despite the quotas, men continue to hold disproportionate decision-making power within Timorese society, particularly at senior government level where women representation remains at 18%.[[19]](#endnote-19) Women’s representation in local leadership positions is low; there are very few female village or hamlet chiefsor female Municipal Administrators. Female village chiefs have increased from 2% in 2012 up to 5% in 2016 while municipal administrators remain low. Women appear to lack support in reaching leadership positions at this level.[[20]](#endnote-20)

**Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Protection:** Bride price (*barlake*) has been described as a root cause of discrimination against Timorese women[[21]](#endnote-21), including one of the causes of domestic violence. Wives are sometimes seen as ‘bought’ by their husband and/or his family and hence treated as property, and girls may be seen as an asset for sale[[22]](#endnote-22). Early marriage is a legal problem, with different minimum age for girls (15) than men (18). However, the median age for first marriage for women aged 25-49 is 20.9 years, similar to the median age for women’s first sexual intercourse[[23]](#endnote-23). A 2017 qualitative study conducted by UNFPA in Covalima, Aileu and Dili identified that young women mostly lack power or control to exercise sexual decision-making in a relationship[[24]](#endnote-24). Attitudes towards GBV are also a reflection of current practices and of women’s perceived lower status relative to men’s. In Timor-Leste, 86% of women and 81% of men believe some cases justify a man hitting his wife.[[25]](#endnote-25) Thirty-five percent of married women reported they have experienced physical and sexual violence by their husbands[[26]](#endnote-26), [[27]](#footnote-1). Government commitments against GBV are through the Domestic Violence law, passed in 2010; National Action Plan on GBV 2017-2021 and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Violence against Women. Thirty-five to thirty-eight percent of women have experienced physical and sexual violence yet 2 out of 3 do not report the case to authorities (formal or traditional law – *adat*): 34% report to their neighbour, family or friends, 3% report to the police, 2% to local leaders and 1% to local women’s organizations and civil society[[28]](#endnote-27). Reasons include: talking about domestic violence is taboo; consideration of the children; keeping a good family name; and a fear of the status of "widow" leading to further discrimination. Further barriers to justice include low access to police, language and literacy, long distance to courts and inefficient legal processes[[29]](#endnote-28). Women’s economic dependence on men makes them vulnerable to violence, but more economically independent women have been found to report higher levels of violence, suggesting a backlash when women challenge traditional gender roles. LGBT[[30]](#footnote-2) persons are known to experience discrimination in their communities and there are a few groups who raise awareness on the issue.

**Gender in Emergencies**:Casualty figures from the 25-year Indonesian occupation vary from 102,000 to up to 300,000. Although there is no sex-disaggregated data, it is agreed that women and children were disproportionally affected during the war. The United Nations reports that thousands of women were subjected to sexual slavery, torture, and forced sterilization during the period.[[31]](#endnote-29) Women are more vulnerable to disasters worldwide. The 2016 El Nino Rapid Gender Analysis showed thatwomen experienced the prolonged drought impacts more intensely than men. As women collect water, they had to contend with fewer water sources further away and experience added household work and community tensions over resources.[[32]](#endnote-30) In addition findings indicated that women were more likely to skip meals and prioritise children in food provision[[33]](#endnote-31). Pregnant and breastfeeding women are especially vulnerable and malnutrition was seen to spike in this group and under 2 year-old infants in some worse affected areas after the 2015/16 El Nino drought.

1. Timor-Leste Population and Housing 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Demographic and Health survey 2016 Timor-Leste [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Demographic and Health Survey 2009-2010 Timor-Leste [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Asian Development Bank (ADB), Country Gender Assessment, 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste. Myrttinen, 2010b [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste. Myrtinnen, 2010b [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Becoming Citizens: Civil Society Activism and Social Change in Timor-Leste, Wigglesworth, 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. ADB, Country Gender Assessment, 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Timor-Leste Ministry of Labor, 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. World Bank, Country Gender Assessment, 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. National Election for Suco Council Result [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. NGOs working group on CEDAW Alternative Report, 2009 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Bride-price and Domestic Violence in Timor-Leste: A Comparative Study of Married-in and Married-out

    Culture in Four Districts. Khan and Hyati, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Demographic and Health Survey, 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. UNFPA, Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage, 2017 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Demographic and Health Survey, 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. National Action Plan (NAP) on Gender-based Violence 2017-2021, Timor-Leste [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. \* Advised by DHS to use with caution as it may be underestimated

    1But see also the Nabilan Baseline Study 2016 which reports that 59% of women who have ever partnered reported experiencing physical and/ or sexual violence in their lifetimes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
28. Understanding Violence Against Women and Children in Timor-Leste: Findings from *Nabilan* Baseline study,

    The Foundation 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
29. ADB, Country Gender Assessment, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
30. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
31. Sian Powell, The Australian, UN Verdict on East Timor, January 19, 2006 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
32. CARE Timor-Leste, El Nino Rapid Gender Analysis, 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
33. Viqueque Drought Anticipation Project. CARE Timor-Leste Project Proposal for START Network, 2017 [↑](#endnote-ref-31)