



Development Planning Unit

Government of the British Virgin Islands

The Population Situation of the British Virgin Islands

1. Presently, the population of the BVI is estimated to be growing at a rate of 2.3% per annum. At this rate, the population will double in 30 years. The estimated size of the population in 1996 was 18,737 persons. This represents an addition of 2,621 person since 1991 and an average of about 525 persons per year. The age distribution of the population continued to change. From 1992 and 1996, the proportion of the young and elderly in the population experienced decreases (though small) while that of the active segment continued to register an increase. The median age of the population continued to increase gradually.

2. Fertility rates in the BVI are relatively low. Based on the records of the hospital, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was around 1.8 between 1992 and 1996. The 1991 census data revealed that the TFR of the BVI was underestimated by some 25%. If women have access to family planning and are educated then they can take responsibility for their reproductive habits. This can go a long way in curbing rapid population growth. In the BVI, practically all women have access to family planning and education. Fertility accounted for around 44.8% of the population increase in the BVI between 1992 and 1996.

3. In 1992, the population density of the BVI was 105 persons per km². This density increased to 123 by 1996. The main island, Tortola, where most of the economic activity is concentrated, accounts for 36% of the land area; it consistently accommodated over 80% of the population. In 1996, the population density of Tortola was 283.

4. Of the population growth experienced in the BVI between 1992 and 1996, immigration accounted for 55.2%. Because of this immigrant-dominated population growth, the "table has now turned", inasmuch as population share is concerned, to favour immigrants. It was estimated that in 1996, 50.3% of the population were immigrants. The 1991 census data showed that 53.6%, 65.1% and 52.2% of all Managers, Professionals and Assistant Professional/Technicians were immigrants. Almost 70% of degree holders and 76.0% of persons with Diplomas in the BVI were immigrants. However, consider the social impact that immigration has had on BVI. The 1991 census data revealed that:

1. Of the working labour force, 61.6% were immigrants.
2. Almost 80% of all nuclear family households contained at least one immigrant.
3. Of all single households, 63.3% were headed by immigrants.
4. Of all single households with children, 54.5% were headed by immigrants.
5. About 32% of immigrant headed households had no spouse residing with them. Of these households, 20% were headed by married individuals.

5. There are also consequences for the sending countries of immigrants. On the negative side is the separation of families and on the positive side is the receipt of remittances. The 1991 census indicated that immigrant women produced 6,516 children of which 1521 were resident in the BVI. This would leave some 5,000 children still living outside the BVI. For 1992 and 1993 alone, immigrants were estimated to have repatriated some USD 15 millions for savings and remitted in excess of USD 40 millions for the maintenance of children and other family members.

6. The marital/union status of the population has a profound effect on population dynamics such as fertility and family structure. Between 1992 and 1996, of children born in the BVI, on average 60% were born outside the confines of marriage. In 1980, the average age of marriage of the general population was 42.4 years. This average age increased to 42.7 years by 1991.

7. In 1980, 25.4% of all households were headed by females. This percent had increased to 28.7% by 1991. The incidence of single headed households (with or without children) was at a high of almost 36% in 1991. The preferred nuclear family arrangement was down to 36% of households by 1991.

8. A study done in 1994, using the relative approach to poverty analysis, found that 17.7% of all households in the BVI were relatively poor in 1991 – i.e. they had an "adult equivalent scale" household per capita income below USD 310.00.

9. The crime rate of the BVI fluctuated between 1990 and 1995; it hit a low of 45.6 criminal offenses per thousand population in 1991 and a high of 65.0 in 1993.

10. Women, children (<15 years) and the elderly (<65 years) are considered the vulnerable groups. The status of women in the BVI has improved considerable over the years. The 1991 census revealed that practically all children (99%) between the ages of 6 and 9 years old attended school. Over 97% of those between the ages of 10 and 16 years old attended school. Enrollment rates at both the primary and secondary levels were very high. The 1991 census data indicated that practically no elderly person was unemployed. This, coupled with social security benefits and other safety nets for the elderly, served to protect them against a sub-standard level of living.

11. In the BVI, the CDR was 4.70, IMR was 13.94 and the Life Expectancy at Birth was 74.8 years in 1996. The literacy rate of the BVI, as calculated from the 1991 census data, was 98.2%.