

## **UNFPA First Agency to Campaign against Sex Selection in China**

The results of the 1990 census in China showed that the country's sex ratio at birth (SRB) was 111.3 boys to 100 girls, which caused concern amongst national researchers and UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. From 1991, after the 1990 census results became available, UNFPA became the very first international agency to raise the issue of sex ratio imbalance in China, which was considered a taboo among Government officials at that time. The Fund took the initiative to break the silence and talk first to Chinese academics to sensitize them and gain their support in taking the issue further up to senior Government officials. UNFPA later took up the matter directly with officials of the then-National Family Planning Commission. It has continued its advocacy with partners ever since.

UNFPA planned to convene a workshop in China to address the problem, but since the issue was such a taboo, the event was instead held in the Republic of Korea, with Chinese academics attending.

Throughout the 1990s and ever since, UNFPA has continuously advocated against practices that lead to sex ratio imbalances. A timeline follows:

### **Timeline:**

1. UNFPA has funded research on sex ratio at birth through the China Population Information and Research Centre and some other Chinese population research institutions since the **1990** census.
2. Starting in 1991, UNFPA became the very first international agency to raise the issue of sex ratio imbalance in China, where it was a major taboo at the time. The Fund first raised the issue with Chinese academics to sensitize and win their support as partners in further advocacy. UNFPA later took up the matter directly with senior government officials, and it has continued its advocacy ever since.
3. In **early 1994**, UNFPA convened a conference on sex ratio imbalance in the Republic of Korea, with Chinese academics in attendance.
4. In **1994**, China outlawed the practice of sex identification of foetuses and sex-selective abortions. UNFPA advocacy helped lead to this action.
5. In **September 1994**, UNFPA's efforts received a boost from United Nations members when they reached a consensus agreement that strongly called for an end to sex selection. At the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, they sought the elimination of "***all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection.***" They also urged governments to "***take the necessary measures to prevent infanticide, prenatal sex selection, trafficking in girl children***".

6. Since **1998**, UNFPA started watching out for imbalances in the sex ratio while monitoring field projects, and raising the issue with local government officials, medical personnel and villagers.
7. On **9 May 2002**, China News Service (CNS) reported that China's 2000 census indicated that the sex ratio of newborns was 116.86 boys to 100 girls in 2000.
8. In **December 2002**, the United Nations Country Team, at UNFPA urging, made advocacy on sex ratio imbalance a priority in its 2003 work plan.
9. In **February 2003**, UNFPA raised the issue with National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC) Minister Zhang Weiqing.
10. In **March 2003**, during Women's Day celebrations, the United Nations Resident Coordinator mentioned sex ratio imbalance as a major concern, during a public statement in Beijing's Great Hall of the People.
11. In **March 2003**, UNFPA China made sex ratio a positive selection criterion for counties competing to be included in NPFPC projects under the Fifth UNFPA Country Programme. A few counties were included on that basis.
12. UNFPA asked the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) to work on sex ratio issues, starting in **2002**. In **mid-2003**, the Federation started internal discussions, and it is now one of its main topics of advocacy at national and provincial levels.
13. In **November 2003**, the National Population and Family Planning Commission included improvements in sex ratio at birth as one of the qualifying indicators in its quality-of-care standards, covering 100 counties.
14. In **March 2004**, the issue was again raised by the United Nations Resident Coordinator during a conference in China on the Millennium Development Goals.
15. In **June 2004**, UNFPA co-sponsored a workshop on sex ratio imbalance with the Ford Foundation, bringing international perspective (India, Republic of Korea, Japan) to the issue. In July 2004 (on World Population Day, 11 July), NPFPC convened a major press conference, describing the problem and its plan to address it, including many of the findings of the UNFPA supported workshop. Since then, sex ratio imbalance has been reported on repeatedly in Chinese media. The workshop findings have also received significant international attention.
16. In **August 2004**, *Women and Men in China – Facts and Figures* was published by the National Statistics Bureau, with support from the UNFPA office in China. This was the first time that sex ratio imbalance in infant mortality rate statistics was published in an English publication.

17. In **2005**, UNFPA funded additional research on gender statistics, including sex ratio of infant mortality. These were presented at a seminar in May and the Beijing+10 Forum in August.
18. In **October 2007**, UNFPA commissioned a major study on sex ratio imbalance in Asia. It documents the issue in China, India, Viet Nam and Nepal and makes recommendations on how governments and their partners can tackle the problem. The results were released at the Asian Reproductive Health Conference in Hyderabad, India, where UNFPA supported a symposium on the subject.
19. In **2007**, UNFPA published *Sex Ratio, Facts and Figures*, a leaflet with data and recommendations. The leaflet is provided to national and international partners to raise the awareness on the issue. It is available on the United Nations China web site at <http://www.un.org.cn/cms/p/resources/30/1359/content.html>.
20. In **2008**, UNFPA successfully advocated for the addition of sex ratio imbalance in China's MDG reporting as one of the challenges to address MDG3, on gender equality.
21. In **2009**, UNFPA supported research that specifically explored factors that contributed to observed declines in sex ratio imbalances in selected provinces. Macro-level legislative, administrative, cultural and economic factors and their influences on individual behaviour change were examined. The findings have been used in developing UNFPA interventions on the issue, in addition to communicating with relevant government bodies.
22. In **2010**, sex ratio imbalance was again included in the MDG report as one of the challenges of meeting MDG 3, on gender equality.
23. In **2010**, UNFPA and the All-China Women's Federation finalized a set of behaviour change communications materials, including a poster, radio play and a TV clip on sex ratio imbalance. The materials are used regularly in UNFPA's pilot projects on gender violence, in two provinces. The TV clip and others were used in daily campaigns on 12,000 local buses in Beijing during the year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. The radio play was broadcast nationwide.
24. Today, during its seventh country programme cycle, UNFPA will continue promoting gender equality and leading efforts to reduce discrimination and violence against women. Sex ratio imbalance is one of the indicators to be used in choosing sites for UNFPA assistance. Furthermore, UNFPA will use community-based programming to address the issue. Along with other UN agencies, the Fund is coordinating an initiative on joint work to tackle the root causes of son preference. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework for China for 2011-2015 contains a specific output on addressing sex ratio imbalance involving eight United Nations agencies, including UNFPA.

Partly as a result of UNFPA's persistent efforts, the Chinese Government enacted laws and executive orders banning the use of equipment, such as ultrasound machines, for non-medical

purposes, such as detecting the sex of foetuses. Violators were punished. UNFPA's work continues.

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