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ARMENIA
COUNTRY PROFILE

Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls: Improving the sex ratio at birth in select countries in Asia and the Caucasus

Yerevan 2018

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADC	Armavir Development Center
AMD	Armenian Dram
ADHS	Armenian Demographic and Health Survey
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EU	European Union
FBO	Faith-based organization
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross domestic product
GG	Gender gap
GFR	General fertility rate
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
ICHD	International Center for Human Development
IVF	In-vitro fertilization
MCPR	Modern contraceptive prevalence rate
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
MWCC	Martuni Women's Community Council
NA	National Assembly
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSS	National Statistical Service
PGD	Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis
RA	Republic of Armenia
SRB	Sex Ratio at Birth
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADDRESSING THE HARMFUL PRACTICE OF SON PREFERENCE AND THE UNDERVALUING OF GIRLS

Son preference is widespread in Armenian families and is rooted in patriarchal culture. This harmful practices combined with access to advanced technologies that allow early identification of sex of the fetus has led to interference into the natural balance of the sexes at the time of birth. At the same time, fertility rates have declined from 2.62 children per woman in the early 1990s to 1.56 in 2010 (with a slight increase in 2016), for an average of 1.6 children per woman in Armenia.

From the early 1990s onwards, there has been deviation from natural sex ratio at birth. While the biologically normal sex ratio at birth can range from 102 to 106 boys per 100 girls, in Armenia ratios as high as 120 boys per 100 girls were observed in the early 2000s, according to the National Statistical Service (NSS). The ratio stabilized at 114 boys per 100 girls in the early 2010s.[1] As a result of wide-scale work conducted by the Government jointly with development partners, including international and local organizations, it dropped to 112 boys per 100 girls in 2016[2] and the latest data provided by NSS for the first six months of 2017 shows continued progress, with 110 boys per 100 girls.

The Armenian Government recognizes the problem of son preference and as a consequence of it, gender-biased sex selection. In support of the Government, UNFPA has worked to support research on the issue and to strengthen the evidence development, followed by wide-scale advocacy and communications efforts and alliance-building, as well as focused technical support.

In 2014, the Government adopted the first decree on the need to adopt measures aimed at prevention of gender-biased sex selection and sex-selective abortions. In 2015, the Government developed and approved a programme to prevent gender-biased sex selection for 2015-2017, to be continued in a new programme for 2018-2022 now in draft to be finalized. In June 2016, Parliament adopted the legislative amendment package presented by the Government that banned sex-selective abortions.

Data from the first six months of 2017 suggest that the joint efforts of key stakeholders are improving the legislative environment and raising awareness on gender-biased sex selection issue and promotion of gender equality; and, in turn, are resulting in significant positive change in the sex ratio at birth to 110 boys per 100 girls. While this decrease in such a short period is undoubtedly a success, the sex ratio at birth in Armenia is still higher than the normal ratio.

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1   NSS Armenia. www.armstat.am/file/article/sv_12_10a_520.pdf
2   NSS Armenia. www.armstat.am/file/article/sv_12_16a_520.pdf

BACKGROUND

ARMENIA AT A GLANCE

Source: Welcome Armenia. UN briefing pack.

The Republic of Armenia is a landlocked mountainous country located in the southern edge of Europe and at the gateway to the Middle East and Asia. Armenia is bounded to the north by Georgia, to the east by Azerbaijan, and to the south and west by Iran and Turkey. It covers an area of 29,743 square kilometres, approximately 71 per cent of which is agricultural land, 12 per cent is forested, 8 per cent is special protected territories and 9 per cent is uncategorized.

The country is subdivided into 11 regions (marzes), including the region of Yerevan, which is the capital city of Armenia (NSS, 2011c).

Demographic information

Population: As of January 1, 2016, the permanent
population of Armenia (calculated based on the census
of 2011) is 2,998,600 – almost 3 million people.

Population [1]	2,998,600
Urban (%) [2]	64
Rural (%) [4]	36
Men	1,429,100
Women	1,569,500
Population, female, aged 15–49	776,000
Population density, per sq.km [3]	103
Fertility rate [4]	1.6
Annual population growth rate (%) [5]	0.3
Modern contraceptive prevalence rate (%) [6]	28
Total abortion rate [7]	0.6
Infant mortality rate for 2016 [8]	8.6
Maternal mortality rate for 2016 [9]	27.1 per 100,000 live births
Sex ratio at birth [10]	112 boys per 100 girls
Life expectancy at birth/years [11]	75 (men 72 years and women 78 years)
Healthy life expectancy/years [12]	62 (men 60 years and women 66 years)

[3]   www.armstat.am/file/doc/99499383.pdf

[5]   www.armstat.am/file/doc/99499383.pdf

[6]   http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST

[6]   NSS Armenia; www.armstat.am/file/article/demog_2018_3.pdf

[7]   http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW

[8]   DHS 2015-2016

[9]   DHS 2015-2016

[10] www.armstat.am/am/?nid=12&id=11014

[11] www.armstat.am/file/article/sv_12_16a_520.pdf

[12] NSS Armenia, official data for 2016

[13] NSS Armenia. https://www.armstat.am/file/article/sv_03_17a_510.pdf

[14] http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=hale&d=WHO&f=MEASURE_CODE%3AWHOSIS_000002

Ethnic breakdown: Armenians (98.1 per cent), Yazidis, Russians, Assyrians, Ukrainians, Kurds, Greeks, and Others (according to the 2011 census results)

Languages: Armenian (official, 97.9 per cent), Yazidi (spoken by Yazidi, 1 per cent), Other (e.g. Russian, Greek, Assyrian, Ukrainian, 1 per cent)

Religion: Christian (Armenian Apostolic Church), the majority of the population profess to be Christian (94.8 per cent); Yazidism (0.8 per cent); other Christianity (2.8 per cent)

Economic variables

GDP, current US$ billion [13]	10.5
GDP per capita, current US$	3.525
Poverty rate (US$5/day 2005 PPP terms)	71.7
GDI	0.993
HDI [14]	0.743

Labour resources: The labour force aged 15–75 is 2 106 700, 1 166 500 out of which are women and 940 200 are men (NSS, 2016). Of this group, 54.3 per cent of women and 72.6 percent of men are included in the category "Economically active population". The Gender Gap (GG) in activity rates of men and women has declined more than two points from 27.8 per cent in 2010 to 25 in 2015 (NSS, 2016).

Managerial positions are mainly held by men. Women's participation in power structures and decision-making positions is limited.

Representation: Women account for 18 representatives (28 per cent) out of 65 municipality members.
In the Government, only one Minister out of 18 is a woman (6 per cent). Despite the introduction of a quota system to assist women to enter politics, women's low level of representation in national government persists.

Study methodology and limitations

The study compiled secondary data through a desk review of existing material; it collected primary data through 12 key-informant interviews. Regarding limitations, it proved difficult to select the "right" key informants and reach them, especially during the summer when the majority of them are on annual leave. Also, the key informants represented diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, making it difficult to generalize results to the larger population given the limited number of interviewees.

[15]   World Bank Armenia. http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/459301492607620860/Armenia-Snapshot-18Apr2017.pdf

[16]   Human Development Report 2016. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/es/ARM.pdf

[17]   www.womennet.am

CHAPTER

1

GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION AND SKEWED SEX RATIO AT BIRTH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A culture of strong son preference and pervasive patriarchal norms, the use of abortion as a family planning method, and the availability of ultrasound technology characterize the context of gender and birth in Armenia. Many parents prefer to have at least one son and, in order to have small families, because of financial difficulties, parents are likely to resort to sex selection to ensure the birth of sons. The sex ratio is almost balanced among first births, but skewed among second births and most evidently among the third and fourth births. As per data from the National Statistical Service, from the early 1990s onwards there has been deviation from the natural sex at birth ratio of 102–106 boys to 100 girls, reaching a ratio of 120 boys to 100 girls in the early 2000s and somewhat stabilizing at 114 boys per 100 girls in the early 2010s. This was exacerbated by a drastic decline in fertility rates, declining from 2.62 children per woman in the early 1990s to 1.56 in 2010 (with a slight increase in 2016), for an average rate of 1.6 children per woman in Armenia.

The study, initiated by UNFPA in 2011, confirmed that, although highly differentiated across regions (marzes), deep preference for sons along with gender-biased sex selection does exist in the Armenian society.

In 2015, the Armenian Government developed and approved a programme to tackle gender-biased sex selection. In June 2016, the Parliament adopted the legislation amendment package, which banned sex-selective abortions. UNFPA has worked intensively with supporting the Government's efforts to address this harmful practice.

1.2 SEX IMBALANCES AT BIRTH IN ARMENIA

The sex ratio at birth level varies by urban and rural area as well as by region. In rural areas the fertility rate is 1.8 births per woman. However, in urban areas, the fertility rate in 2010 was 1.6 births per woman, and the families engaged in gender-biased sex selection during the third pregnancy and even more so during the fourth pregnancy (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Sex ratio at birth in Armenia

Urban, 2016 ● Rural, 2016 ● Urban, 2011 ● Rural, 2011

Source: Monitoring Report, ICHD 2017.
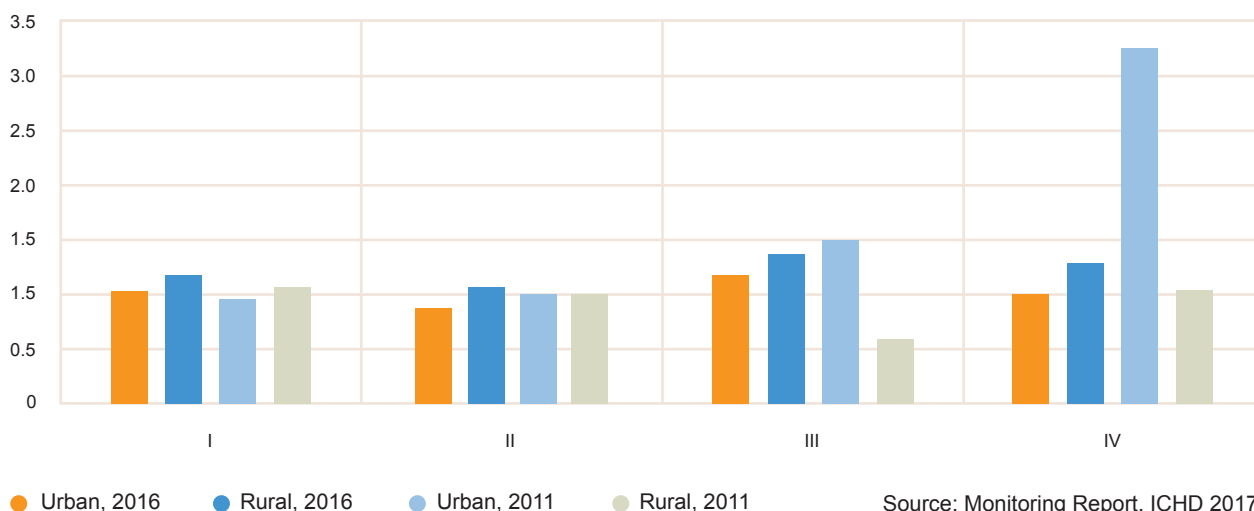
In late 2014, following successive policy dialogues and application of other effective mechanisms by development partners and civil society organizations, the Government adopted the first decree on the need to adopt measures aimed at the prevention of gender-biased sex selection and sex-selective abortions. The 2015–2017 State Programme on Preventing Sex-Selective Abortions was adopted in 2015, and currently the 2018–2022 State Programme on Preventing Gender-Biased Sex Selection is being drafted by collective efforts of the Government and development partners.

1.3 CAUSES OF SEX SELECTION

The convergence of three factors have caused the dramatic increased[18] in gender-biased sex selection: i) Son preference, ii) the rapid spread of prenatal sex selection technology and iii) decreasing family size (fertility decline).

Son Preference

Son Preference, the oldest and most deeply rooted of the three factors, may be motivated by economic and social factors. Sex selection and the birth of male children is connected with social, cultural and economic benefits. According to survey data[19] on planning the number of children at marriage, almost half of women (46 per cent) preferred "one boy and one girl", followed by the option of "two boys and two girls" (14 per cent), while 13.8 per cent of women had no number or gender preference for children.

The same survey found that men are most often identified as the primary breadwinner in the families, with 71.2 per cent of women saying their spouse/partner had this role. Only 8.5 per cent of women considered themselves the primary breadwinner in their family. The majority of working women (two out of every three working women) work full-time. In Armenia, women intend to work after childbirth. According to the survey, half of working women (50.7 per cent) wish to work after their child reached 3 years old, 29.5 per cent after their

Figure 2: Reasons for son preference 2011

- Economic justification
- Power, authority
- Security
- Blood line

36 % — 8 % — 25 % — 31 %
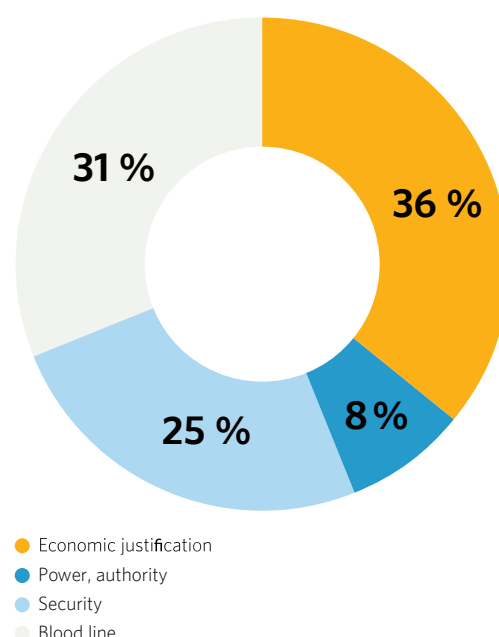
• Decisions on the number
• of children of different sex
• in the family are mostly
• made jointly by the woman
• and her spouse/partner
• (80 per cent). When women
• earn no income, they risk
• not participating in the
• decision making inside
• their household.[22]

child reached 6 months and 1.4 per cent immediately after childbirth. In general, families are supportive regarding women's desire to return to their work (93 per cent) but in reality only 58 per cent of the female workforce in Armenia have jobs and work, despite the fact that their families support their desire to return to work.[20] According to 83 per cent of non-working mothers with children under 3 years old, the root cause of their

unemployment is the need to take care of their children; in 7 per cent of cases their husband is against their employment, and only 6 per cent do not want to work.[21]

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18 Guilmoto (2013). Sex imbalances at birth in Armenia.
19 ICHD (2017). Report on prevalence and reasons for sex-selective abortions in Armenia.
20 World Bank (2016). Armenia country gender assessment.
21 Analysis of Public Policy on Extending Early Childhood Care and Development Services to Prevent Gender-Biased Sex Selection,ICHD,2017
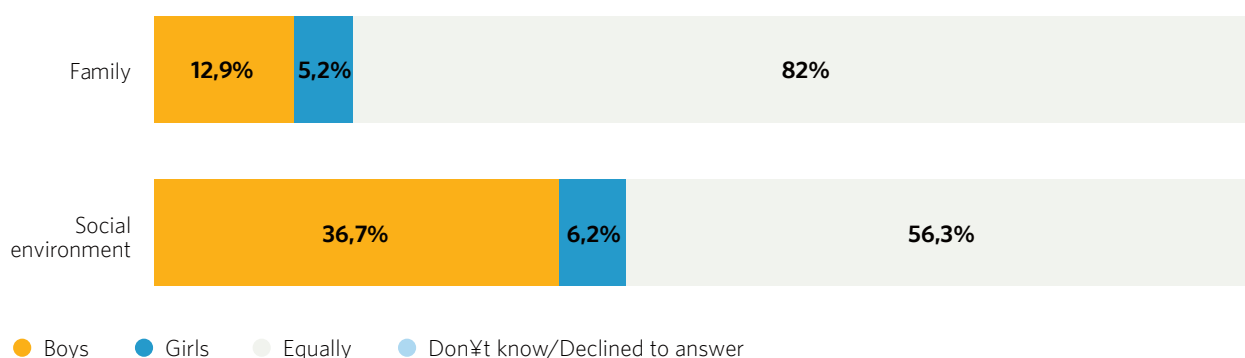22 ICHD (2017). Report on prevalence and reasons for sex-selective abortions in Armenia.

Figure 3: Sex preference in 2011 and 2016

	Family, 2011	Environment, 2011F	amily, 2016E	nvironment, 2016
Equal	47,3%	35,1%	82,0%	56,3%
Girls	7,4%	5,6%	5,2%	6,2%
Boys	45,3%	59,3%	12,9%	36,7%

● Boys ● Girls ● Equal

Source: Monitoring Report, ICHD 2017.
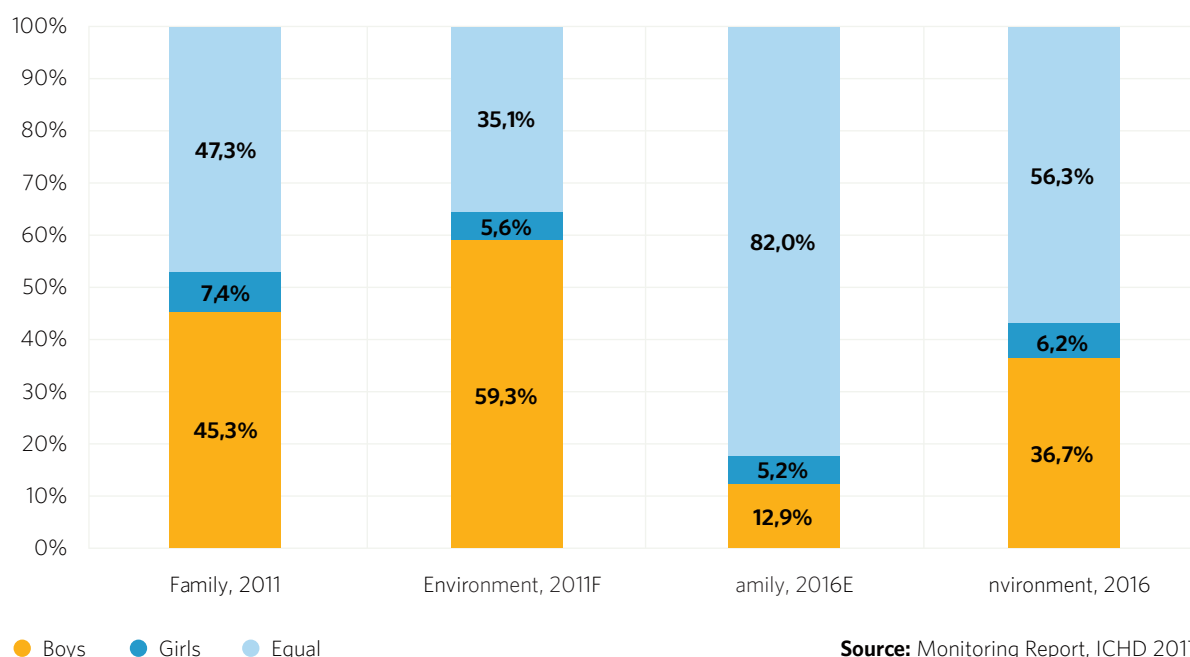
There is a direct positive correlation between woman's average monthly income and her education. Hence, the higher a woman's education level, the higher her average monthly income and, consequently, the higher is her involvement in decision making.

Comparing the data on sex preference from 2011 and 2016, there is no significant change in the preference for girls; however, significant changes are observed in terms of preferences for sons (figure 3). Changes are observed in terms of son preference, which declined from 45.3 per cent of families to 12.9 per cent voicing a desire for a boy. The increase in terms equal preference for a boy or a girl within the family is also positive, up from 47.3 per cent in 2011 to 82 per cent in 2016.

To evaluate children's behaviour in terms of supporting their elderly parents, UNFPA conducted a study on number of children of elderly people staying in the homes of the elderly. According to the study results, 45.6 per cent of elderly people have no children and 54.4 percent have children. Among those who have children, 28 per cent have only daughters, 33 percent have only sons, and 39 per cent have both daughters and sons. The frequency of visits showed that 68.5 per cent of elderly parents that have sons had not been visited by their sons while 58 percent of elderly parents had not been visited by their daughters. [23] Son preference can be attributed to pressure from family members and the social environment. Currently, family members seem to have less influence than in the past. Even in cases where there is active or passive pressure, young people do not pay much attention to it (figure 4).

Figure 4: In immediate social environment/family the preference given to boy or girl

	Boys	Girls	Equally	Don't know/Declined to answer
Family	12,9%	5,2%	82%	
Social environment	36,7%	6,2%	56,3%	

● Boys ● Girls ● Equally ● Don¥t know/Declined to answer

Source: Report on prevalence of sex-selective abortions in Armenia, 2017.

23 UNFPA (2015). Study on number of children of elderly people staying in elderly houses.

Overall, the number of women who prefer sons is nearly 1.7 times larger than that of women who prefer daughters (29.9 per cent and 16.9 per cent, respectively) regardless of the pregnancy order, even in the case of first pregnancy.[24]

- Sex ratio at birth changes
- by birth order. Significant
- sex ratio imbalance is
- observed in case of third and
- subsequent children.

The gender composition of the firstborn children has a slight deviation, regardless of the educational level; however, in the case of third childbirth, the maximum deviation of the sex ratio from the biological norm is obvious: there are many boys among newborns. In the case of the third birth, a sex ratio at birth of 1.48 is observed among women with high education and 1.22 among women with secondary education. The correlation between sex ratio at birth and family income shows that the sex ratio at birth in 20 per cent of the wealthiest families meets the biological norm (1.06), while in 20 per cent of the poorest families the number of girls exceeds boys (0.94). When looking at sex preference and personal income, or types of employment by sectors, women exhibited more son preference than daughter preference, suggesting that increasing their personal income or education attainment level would not alone solve the issue. It has deeper roots that are conditioned by social norms framing and defining the behaviour of any individual regardless of gender, education attainment level and/or whether urban or rural.

Sex ratio at birth and woman's marital status: As per observations, when the birth of the child is registered by the father the sex ratio at birth is 116.8. When the birth is registered by the mother (which is most probably the case of single mothers) the sex ratio is 106.3, a level that is within the normal sex ratio at birth.[25] Though no official data exists, this may be a reflection of son preference by fathers, who take the step themselves to register the birth of a boy.

Availability of modern sex selection technology

Sex selection technologies are continuously improving. They enable future parents to influence the sex even before conception or to determine the sex of the foetus during the first weeks of pregnancy. This factor is closely connected with the availability of enabling technology

for adequate sex selection. This is also connected with the effectiveness of the available methods, their cost and accessibility, as well as the legal environment. Available methods in Armenia are ultrasound examination, amniocentesis, Chorionic Villus Sampling as well as "folk techniques".

Currently, Armenia can offer high-tech reproductive services. The cost of services is quite expensive ($2,600 to $3,500) depending on the clinic, technology, etc. Some of clinics in the near future will be equipped with equipment for providing Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis, which is a potential instrument for gender-biased sex selection. However, the use of sex selection techniques is banned in Armenia, unless it is connected with risk for sex-linked genetic disease.

Pregnancy outcome after prenatal sex determination: Once the sex is determined, the overwhelming majority (97 per cent) of women maintain their pregnancy, whereas 3 per cent have an induced abortion. The analysis of data on decision-making regarding their own personal and health-related issues shows that in majority of cases (80 per cent) the decision is made by women. Once the sex is determined, there are no significant differences in opinion between pregnant women and their spouses/partners regarding the continuation of pregnancy. Thus, the majority of women, their spouses/partners and family members (98 per cent) want to have their child regardless of its sex.

Induced abortion methods and accessibility of services: As noted above, only 3 per cent of women decided to terminate the pregnancy. In majority of cases, the abortions are performed in the maternity hospitals. In Armenia, the frequency of medical abortions has tended to increase in recent years; however, some cases of drug-induced abortion were conducted without a doctor's involvement and were connected with serious complications. For this reason, the Ministry of Health released a decree according to which these medicines can be bought only by physician's prescription.

Today the number of self-induced abortions has declined, as seen in 2017 survey data. Abortion in Armenia is legal, when it performed during the first trimester of the pregnancy (up to 12 weeks) at request of the woman. As per the new amendment to the Law on Reproductive Human Rights and Reproductive Health, adopted in 2016, a three-day waiting period to think over their decision is required for women who decided to terminate pregnancy. The cost of service varies, depending with on the clinic, with an average cost of $42.

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[24] ICHD (2017). Report on prevalence and reasons for sex-selective abortions in Armenia.

[25] UNFPA Armenia (2013a). Sex imbalances at birth factsheet.

Fertility decline is also a factor

As discussed above, the fertility decline also contributes to sex selection. The fertility behaviour is dependent on the birth order and family composition. For Armenian families, usually one boy among two children is enough to fulfil the fertility intentions. Son preference and gender-biased sex selection is highest during the third pregnancy and fourth pregnancy, reaching the sex ratio at birth of more than 160 boys per 100 girls (figure 5).

Figure 5: Distribution of sex ratio at birth per region (marzes) (parity 3+)

SRB (parity 3+)
- 196 to 213 (1)
- 180 to 196 (3)
- 164 to 180 (3)
- 148 to 164 (3)
- 132 to 148 (1)
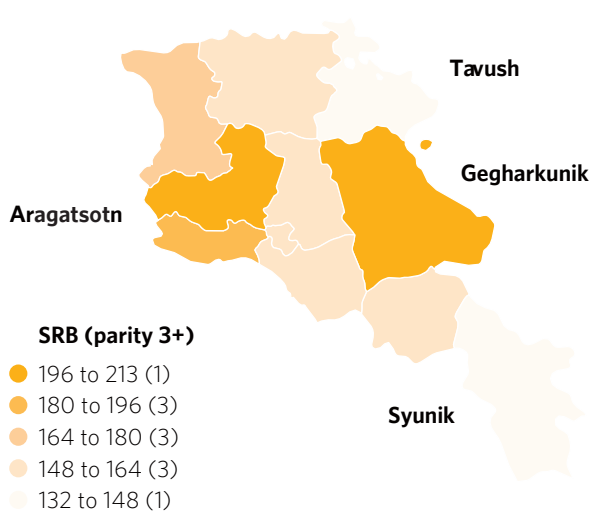
Source: UNFPA Fact Sheet, Armenia, 2013

## 1.4 VARIATION IN SON PREFERENCE IN ARMENIA

Son preference has decreased significantly over the past six years, being replaced by a response favouring no gender for any future child. In 2011, 59.3 per cent of women survey respondents reported believing that the environment (that is, their reference network) preferred a boy over a girl. As of 2017, this number has declined to a level of 36.7 per cent. For the immediate family, the percentage of respondents stating a preference for sons declined from 45.3 per cent in 2011 to 12.9 per cent in 2017. In the meantime, there has been no significant change when looking at the preference for daughters. The 2017 survey found that while most women stated that there is no preference for the sex of first child, the preference for a son as the first child is most evident among women's spouses/partners (40.6 per cent) (figure 6).

1.5 REGIONAL/MARZ DIFFERENCES

Data on gender preference in families differs slightly depending on area (urban or rural). In rural areas, the number of families with a preference for a son is three times higher than that of families with a preference for a daughter (16.1 per cent vs. 5.2 per cent). In urban areas, this number is two times higher (11.2 per cent vs. 5.2 per cent). Data on sex preferences broken down by region is provided in figure 7.
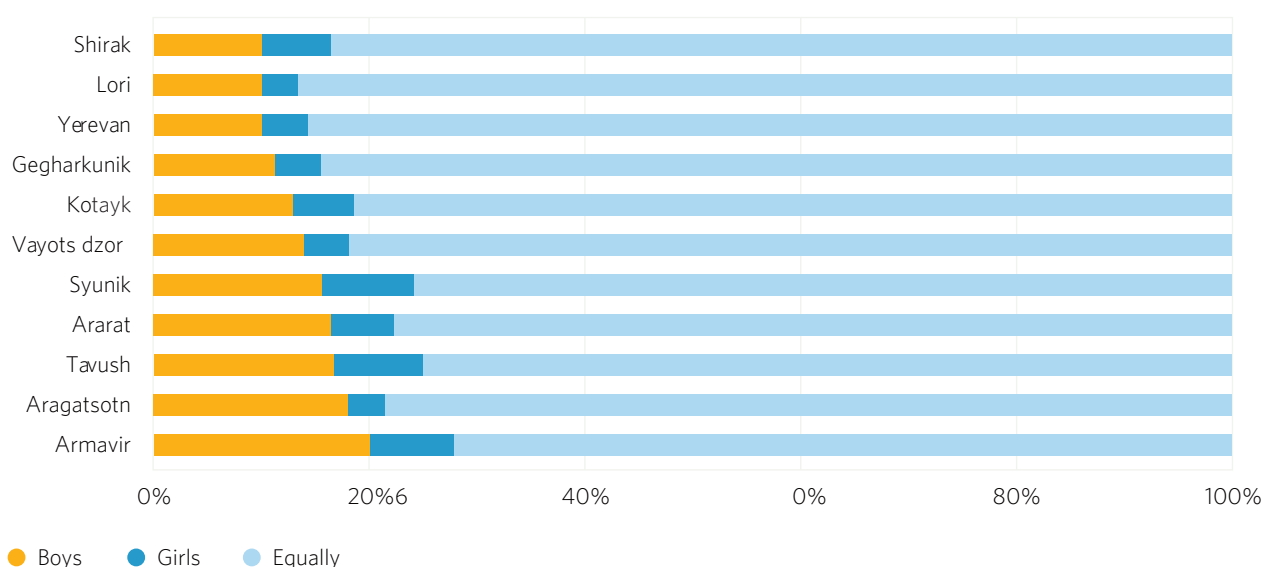
There is a statistically significant difference in the interviewed women's preferences depending on whether they were from rural or urban communities as show in figure 8.

Figure 6: Sex preference at first pregnancy broken down by family members
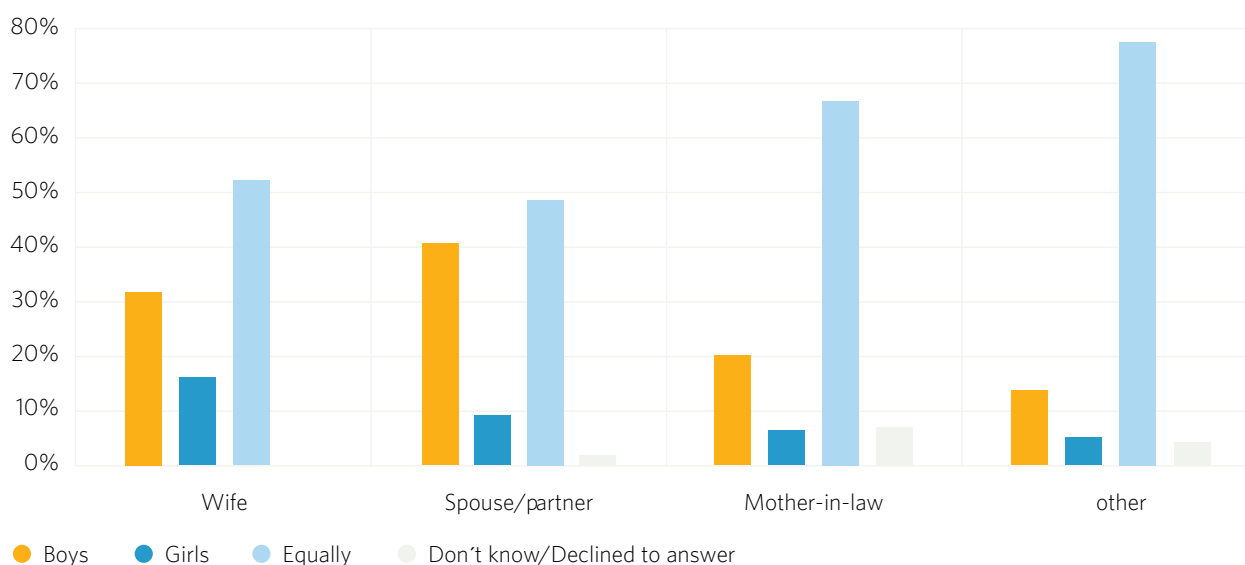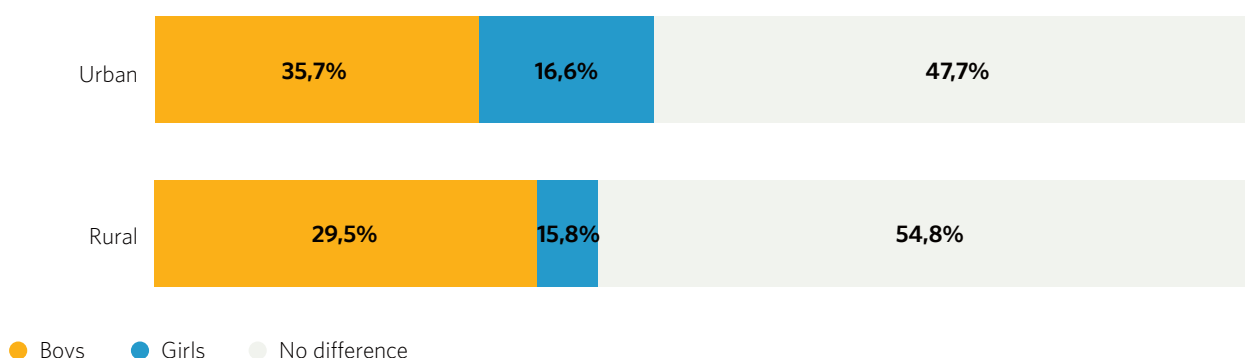

Source: Report on Prevalence and Reasons for Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia, 2017.

Figure 7: Family preferences for a child's gender broken down by region

Legend: ● Boys ● Girls ● Equally

Regions (top to bottom): Shirak, Lori, Yerevan, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Vayots dzor, Syunik, Ararat, Tavush, Aragatsotn, Armavir

X-axis: 0% 20%6 40% 0% 80% 100%

Source: Report on Prevalence and Reasons for Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia, ICHD 2017.

Figure 8: Preference of child's gender during first pregnancy by communities

| Urban | Boys 35,7% | Girls 16,6% | No difference 47,7% |
| Rural | Boys 29,5% | Girls 15,8% | No difference 54,8% |

Legend: ● Boys ● Girls ● No difference

Source: Report on Prevalence and Reasons for Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia, ICHD 2017.

In all regions of Armenia, women show a clear preference for a son for their first child. Such preference is greater in the Vayots Dzor, Ararat, Shirak and Lori regions. Son preference is lower in the Yerevan and Syunik regions, where most women (61.6 per cent and 62.4 per cent, respectively) said the gender of their first child did not matter.

Socio-demographic factors such as religion, ethnicity and language do not significantly influence the country statistics, since Armenia has a nearly homogeneous population and the majority of the population are ethnic Armenians and profess to be Christian.
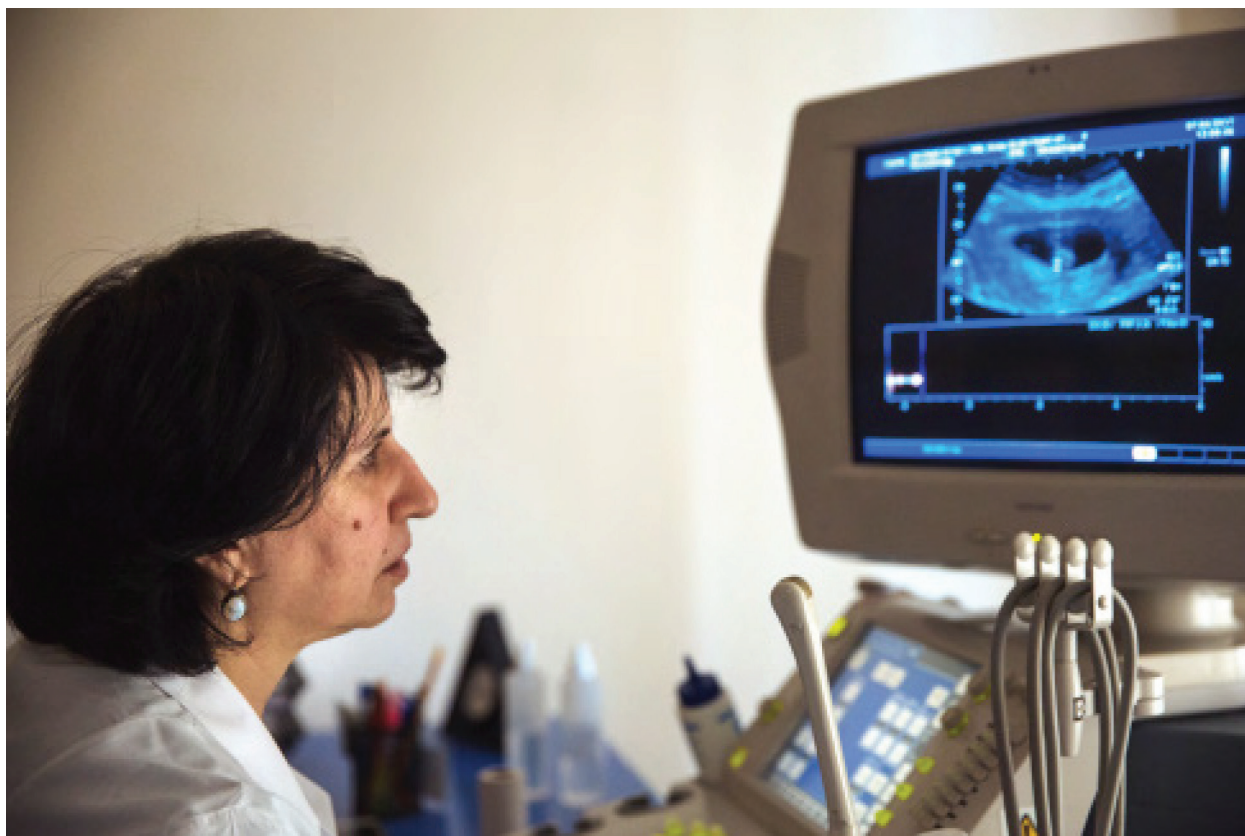
Doctor performing ultrasound examination

Photo: ©UN/Armenia2017/Hilton

CHAPTER

2

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY EFFORTS

In support of the Government of Armenia, UNFPA have work to raise awareness on the issue of son preference and gender-biased sex selection through wide-scale advocacy and communication. Together with the international and local organization UNFPA started campaigns to raise public awareness on the gender-biased sex selection problem in Armenia. The two-year programme "Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Armenia" (2015-2017 April) was funded by the European Union. A large-scale public awareness raising campaign, research, and a number of policy reviews were conducted within the EU-funded programme, which was implemented by ICHD in partnership with STC Netherlands, Armavir Development Centre, Martuni Women's Community Council and Save the Children.

- Among many activities,
- the programme developed
- a practical guideline for
- priests and provided training
- for priests as part of a
- successful collaboration with
- faith-based organizations.

Faith-based organizations have been instrumental in conducting effective awareness-raising activities. These organizations are strategically well-positioned to influence human life, especially in the context of family, fertility, health, violence and community affairs in the face of contemporary population and development challenges.

Understanding son preference, and thus preventing the devaluation of girls and women, is a necessary steps to lead society into a newly framed social reality. In this regard, World Vision Armenia within the programme "Care for Equality" (2015-2019) currently is working towards building a positive parenting approach aimed at replacing existing stereotypes with an environment in which children are equally valued. Research commissioned by UNICEF along with the Women's Resource Center will also complement the ongoing redefinition efforts. The aim of the research is to measure the existing stereotypes of son preference by examining the implicit associations of women and men in Armenia, as well as to investigate stories that measure self and other expectations in relation to gender-biased sex selection in Armenia.

● Pregnant woman

Photo: ©UN/Armenia2017/Hilton

3

THE RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

3.1 INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Armenia has ratified the majority of relevant United Nations conventions and regulations on human rights and gender equality, without reservations, and maintains their ratification including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (1993) and its Optional Protocol signed in 2006[27], the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1993) and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1993). Armenia also signed the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994). The Government has made significant efforts to fully address convention obligations and align national legislation.

The effort to end gender-biased sex selection contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals, which were built on successes of the Millennium Development Goals and came into effect in January 2016. These global goals are a call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls is of particular relevance.

A United Nations inter-agency statement was developed in 2011 by OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO. The statement identified the joint framework for action on preventing gender-biased sex selection, as well as the expertise that each agency can bring for tackling this harmful practice.

3.2 NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND FRAMEWORKS

National laws, along with national policy documents (table 1).

- The Government has taken
- certain steps to harmonize
- national policies with gender
- equality principles and with
- international requirements
- in that field.

The principles and provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action as well as other international documents on gender equality have been serving as a basis for creating a number of national documents to ensure gender equality.

Though Armenia's inheritance laws are "gender-neutral" there is a traditional practice of leaving the family home, land and business to sons. Armenia is characterized by a patrilineal kinship system, when an individual's family membership derives through his or her father's lineage.[28]

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[27] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2016). Concluding observations.

[28] Khachatryan, et al (2015).

Table 1: National legislation and national framework

National laws	National policies and strategies
Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (adopted in 1995 and amended in 2015)	National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in Society in 2004–2010
RA Law on Citizenship (1995)	RA Gender Policy Concept Paper (2010)
Electoral Code	Human Rights Action Plan 2014–2016 (2014)
RA Labour Code (2004)	Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan for 2011–2015 and the Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender Based Violence for 2011-2015
RA Civil Code (1998)	State programme to prevent sex-selective abortions for 2015–2017; a new programme for 2018–2022 has been drafted
RA Law on Civil Service (2001)	National Strategy, Programme and Actions Timeframe on Reproductive Health Improvement for 2007–2015 (2007) and a new National Strategy, Programme and Actions Timeframe on Reproductive Health Improvement for 2016–2020 (2016)
RA Family Code (2004)	National Child and Adolescent Health (CAH) and Development Strategy 2016-2020
RA Law on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights (2002)	The Gender Equality Strategy for 2018–2022 and an Action Plan for 2018–2022 is in the process of preparation
RA Law on Medical Care and Services to the Population (1996)	Child Rights Protection Strategic Programme 2017–2021 (2017)
RA Law on Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2013)	
RA Law on Preventing Violence in the Family, Protecting the Victims of Violence in the Family, and Restoring Harmony in the Family (2018)	

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Armenia, a country with traditional patriarchal stereotypes, there is an evident pattern of son preference. The patrilineal kinship system in Armenia makes sons more desirable as they ensures the continuity of the family lineage, inherits property, and is the guarantor of the material well-being of the family. Son personifies authority, strength and protection whereas daughter are perceived as caregivers, helping and taking care of her parents.

Though data on the sex ratio at birth has shown significant improvement over the past six years, the current sex ratio at birth is still higher than the normal ratio. Within the country, the sex ratio at birth level differs: some regions/marzes display markedly higher levels of male births. As per projections, in case of persistent gender-biased sex selection, the number of female births will be reduced by up to 2,000 births per year in the future. In other words, some 2,000 girls will have gone "missing" from the population. The impact of this high proportion of male births could result in increased migration pressures if men wish to marry but women are too few in number. The skewed sex ratio at birth could also lead to increasing crime, including abduction, and trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of marriage or sexual exploitation.

Challenges

Social norms are changing as evidenced in the improved sex ratio at birth in recent years, and a number of legislative and policy measures to address son preference, gender-biased sex selection and promote gender equality have been adopted. However, persistent challenges need to be addressed:

• Weak law enforcement and monitoring mechanisms

• Remaining social pressures

• Traditional gender inequalities and patriarchal stereotypes

• Lack of access and availability of early child care services

• Recent armed clashes over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the losses of young men.

Lack of child care services keeps women out of the labour market and limits women's opportunity for employment and career development, which ultimately results in a low level of decision-making authority in the household. Armed conflict may promote the desire to have more boys because more men are needed to at the frontline.

Opportunities and recommendations

The aim is to ensure the sustainability of existing initiatives with regard to prevention of son preference, gender-biased sex selection and promoting gender equality. Key steps are recommended:

Policy dialogue and partnerships

• Continue policy dialogue with the Government of Armenia and other stakeholders to address son preference, gender-biased sex selection and promote gender equality.

• Seek collaboration with local and international organizations.

Provision of reliable data for further policy-making

• Support further monitoring and analysis of statistical sources depicting the extent and determinants of sex imbalances at birth.

Support research on specificities of skewed sex ratio at birth.

Advocacy and social norm change interventions

• Continue public awareness activities in society on prevention of son preference and undervaluing of girls, as well as consequences of sex imbalances at birth.

• Continue work with medical communities to sensitize reproductive health care and ultrasound technology providers on the harmful practice of gender-biased sex selection.

• Increase the engagement with faith-based organizations

to implement effective campaigns to promote gender equality and prevent gender-biased sex selection.

• Expand the variety of channels used to convey messages on gender equality and prevention of son preference and gender-biased sex selection, e.g. television, radio, online and print media, social media and flash-mobs.

• Keep educating social workers and teachers about the importance of gender equality and prevention of son preference and gender-biased sex selection.

Increase the value of girls and women in society

• Reframe the girl child. Girls should start being associated with the winner's image. Depict a combination of functions in which women participate in household income generation and decision making. Share success stories of empowered women via social media and other communications channels;

• Share success stories of women through different communication channels, including social media.

• Loosen the parenting roles and induce fathers to increase their participation in childcare, to lift the double burden off the shoulders of working women.

• Improve women's knowledge about their rights.

To successfully tackle the problem of son preference and gender-biased sex selection, the main reasons for son preference should be addressed. There is a need for a continuous and multifaceted approach that will involve stakeholders at all levels to put in place supportive legal and policy measures for girls and women, and for empowerment of women. The shifting in social norms that will lead to behaviour change is a long-term process. It is connected with interventions that, along with legislative and policy changes, should be linked to large-scale and systematic awareness-raising campaigns to improve the standing of women in society and to attribute equal value to women and men.

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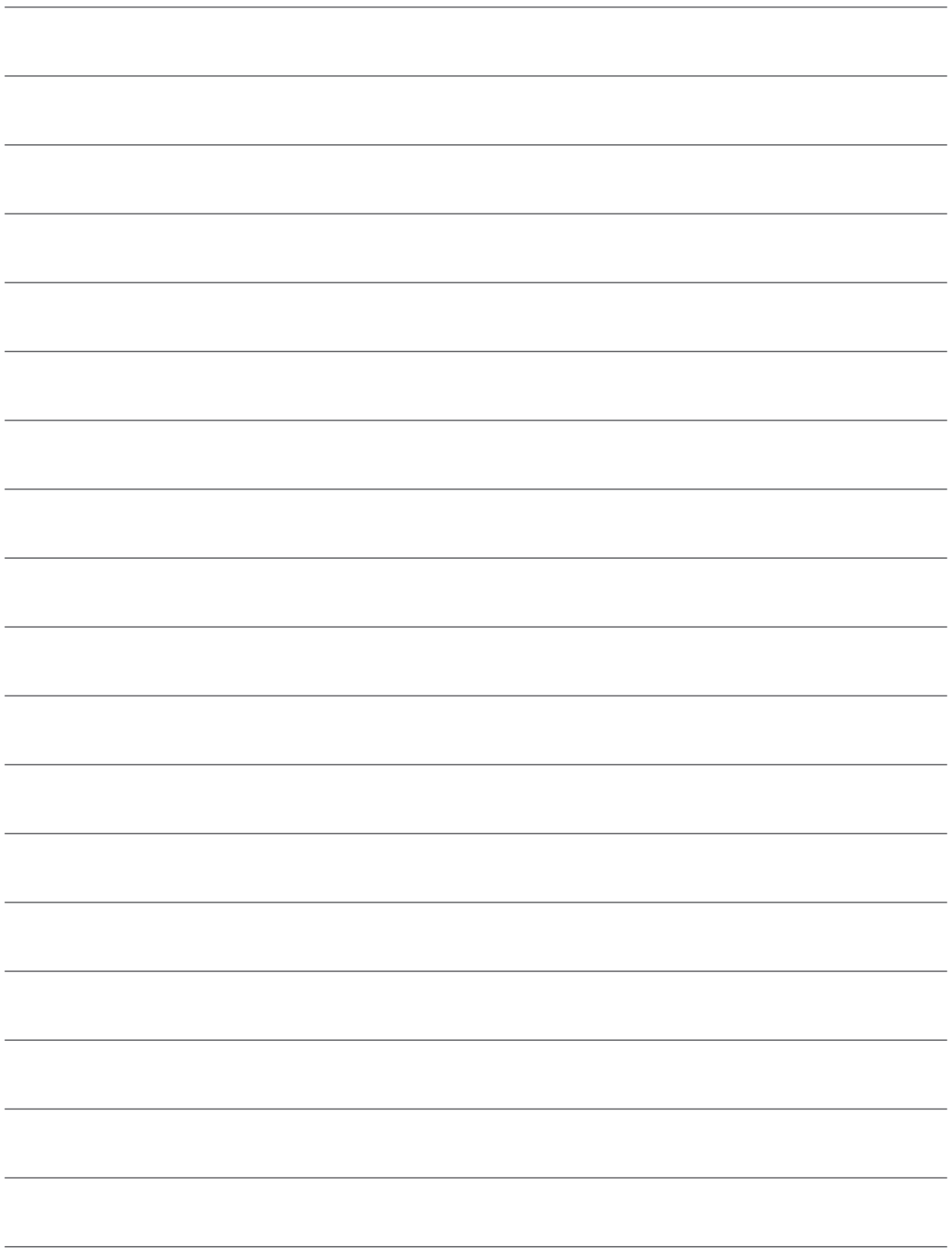
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