



The healthy development of children is the basis for positive human and social development. In recent years, while great improvements have been made in the survival and development of China's large population of children, noticeable internal disparities remain. Factors such as rapid socio-economic transformation, unbalanced regional development, and mass internal migration have resulted in survival and development challenges for many children. The censuses and surveys are rich sources of basic data and information on children, reflecting the demographic changes over time and the key characteristics of sub-groups. Analysis of census data can support enhanced understanding of the challenges faced by children and help inform more evidence-based decision making to address these challenges towards the fulfilment of child rights. This publication describes and analyzes the status of China's child population, based on data from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey and previous censuses and inter-census surveys.

#### Definitions:

**Children:** According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are persons below 18 years of age, i.e. persons aged 0-17 years.

**Development stages:** In this publication, child development is divided into five stages, based on age range: infant stage (0-2 years), pre-primary stage (3-5 years), primary school stage (6-11 years), junior secondary stage (12-14 years) and senior secondary stage (15-17 years).

**Migrant children:** Migrant children refer to those members of the migrant population who are aged 0-17 years. The migrant population refers to persons whose place of residence is different from the location (e.g. town/township or street committee) of their household registration (*hukou*), and who have left the location of their household registration for more than six months. It excludes the population whose current place of residence is different from that of their *hukou* registration, but is within the same city-level administration.

**Left-behind children:** Left-behind children refer to children who live in their original domicile, but do not live together with their parents, as either one parent or both parents have migrated. **Rural left-behind children** refer to left-behind children whose household registration locations are in rural areas. **Urban left-behind children** refer to left-behind children whose household registration locations are in urban areas.

**Poverty-stricken area:** Poverty-stricken areas include the original 592 "key poverty counties" identified by the Government of China for focused poverty alleviation efforts, and the 680 counties that are located in 14 "poverty blocks" (11 blocks, along with the Tibet Autonomous Region, ethnically Tibetan regions in four provinces, and South Xinjiang), as defined in the new *Outline for Development-oriented Poverty Reduction for China's Rural Areas (2011-2020)*. There is an overlap of 440 counties between the list of "key poverty counties", and the updated "poverty blocks". Therefore, there are 832 distinct counties categorized as "poverty-stricken areas."

#### Data Sources:

The data in this publication mainly comes from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China, as well as from previous censuses and inter-census surveys. Currently, China conducts a national census every ten years, with six censuses conducted to date, in 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010. China conducts an inter-census population survey in the middle year between two censuses, with a sampling fraction of 1% (also called "mini-census"). The two most recent inter-census surveys were conducted in 2005 and 2015.

#### Acknowledgement:

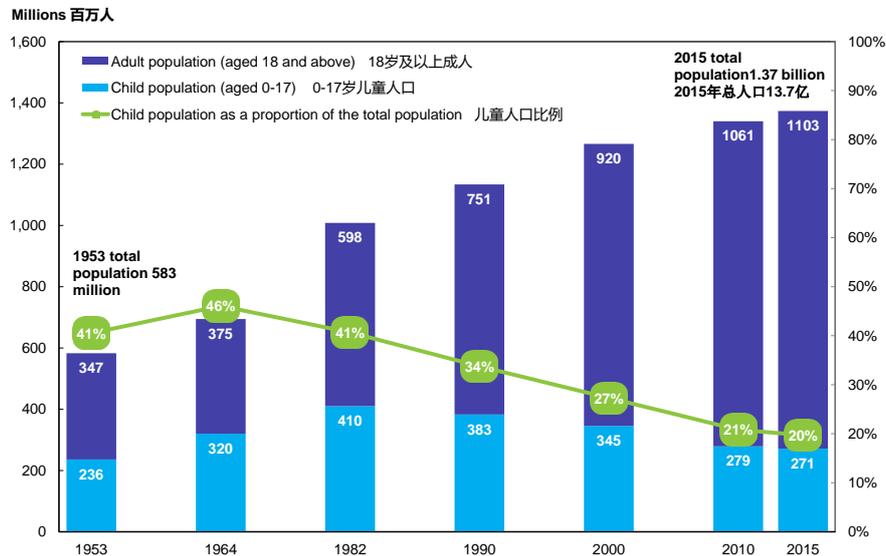
This publication has been developed on the basis of the research projects conducted on the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey by Professor Duan Chengrong and Dr. Lv Lidian from Renmin University. These research projects received the technical and financial support of the NBS/UNICEF/UNFPA Joint Data Project.

## 1. Changes in the size of the child population

### 1.1 China

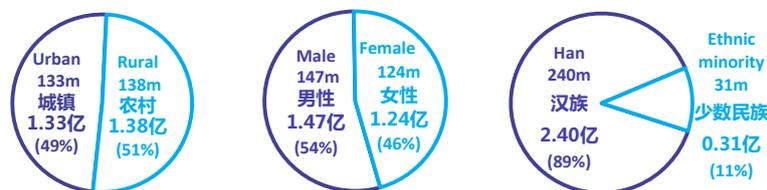
According to data from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey, the child population aged 0-17 in China was 271 million in 2015, accounting for 19.7% of the total national population. Rapid economic development and changing demographic structures, together with sustained low birth rates since the implementation of the family planning policy in the late 1970s; the size and proportion of China's child population has continually declined since the 1980s, while became more stable during the five year period between 2010 and 2015 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Size of child population aged 0-17, China, 1953-2015<sup>1</sup>



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Figure 2: Overview of the Composition of child population in China, 2015<sup>2</sup>



Age 年龄	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total 0-17岁合计
Level of education 学龄阶段	0-2 years 幼儿		Pre-primary 学前教育			Primary 小学阶段					Junior Secondary 初中阶段		Senior Secondary 高中阶段						
Number of children (millions) 儿童人数 (百万人)	45.48		49.83			90.12					41.55		43.87						270.84
Number of migrant children (millions) 流动儿童人数 (百万人)	4.63		5.90			9.34					4.12		10.26						34.26
Number of rural left-behind children (millions) 农村留守儿童人数 (百万人)	7.84		7.92			14.11					5.60		5.03						40.51
Number of urban left-behind children (millions) 城镇留守儿童人数 (百万人)	7.44		5.55			7.57					3.44		4.25						28.26

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

<sup>1</sup> The reference time of Census of 1953, 1964, 1982 and 1990 was July 1. Since then, the Census and the 1% National Population Sample Survey have changed the reference time to November 1. Due to different timing, the relevant data presented may differ slightly than the year-end figures published in the China Statistical Yearbook.

<sup>2</sup> For more details on the composition of child population, please see section three of this publication, titled Composition of Child Population.

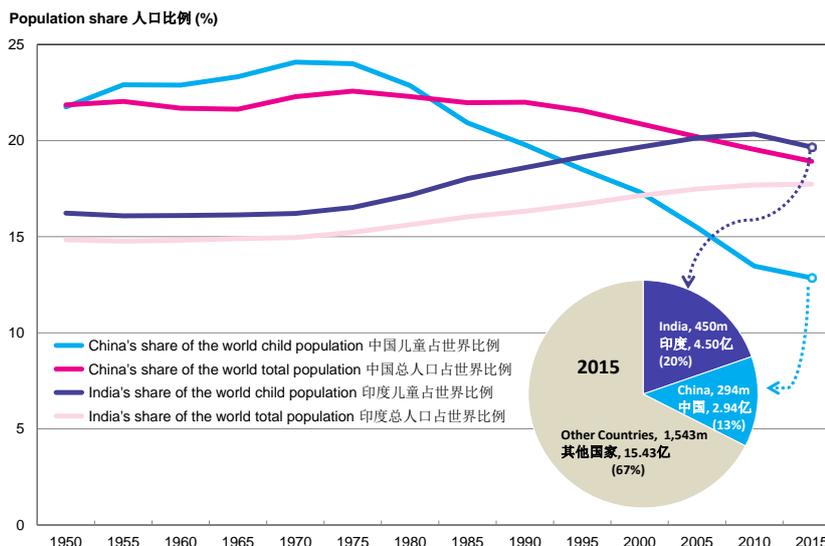
## 1.2 The world

According to internationally comparable estimates reported in the UN's *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*<sup>3</sup>, both the global total population and the global child population aged 0-17 have grown rapidly over the past 60 years. The total population of the world has tripled, increasing from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 7.4 billion in 2015; the child population more than doubled from 1 billion in 1950 to 2.3 billion in 2015. Since the 1970s, due to the size of China's population, and the influence of Chinese demographic trends on the global demographic landscape, the world's child population began to grow less rapidly than the total population.

In 2015, China remained the world's most populous country, accounting for 18.9% of the world's population. China's child population ranked second in the world, accounting for 12.9% of the global child population, significantly lower than its previous share. China's child population as a proportion of global child population began to drop progressively after 1980 (Figure 3). In 2015, China's total population was 88 million more than that of India, but its child population was only 65% of India's. India became the country with the largest child population in the world in 1991, when its child population exceeded that of China for the first time. India's total population is estimated to exceed that of China in 2024<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 3: China and India's share of the world's child population, 1950-2015**

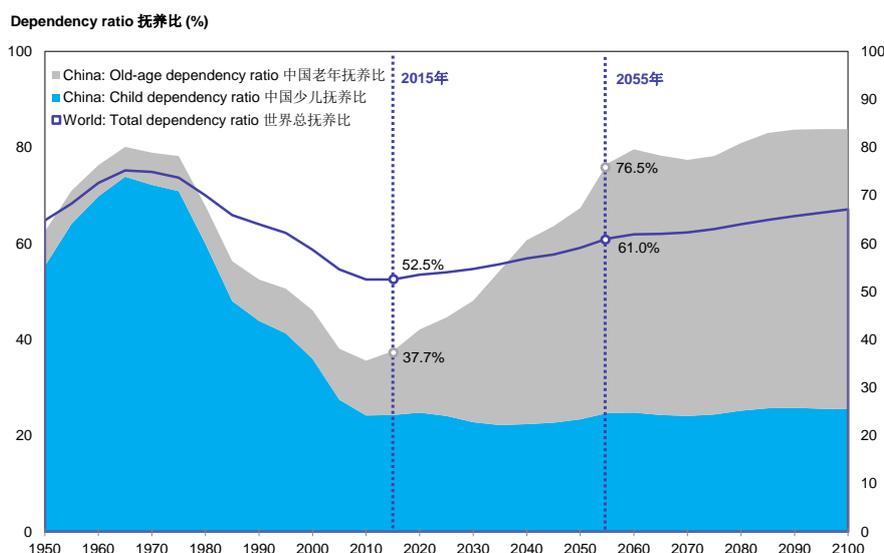
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*



The child dependency ratio in China (ratio of the population aged 0-14 to the population aged 15-64) dropped by approximately 60% between 1980 and 2015. China is now one of the countries with the lowest child dependency ratios in the world. By contrast, the old-age dependency ratio in China (ratio of the population aged 65 and above to the population aged 15-64) kept rising (Figure 4), while population ageing accelerated. At present, China's total dependency ratio is considered low globally, about 38% according to the estimates of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. With the further transformation of the population structure and the decline of the "demographic dividend", the total dependency ratio in China is expected to exceed 75% in 2055, much higher than the estimated global average.

**Figure 4: Dependency Ratio in China and the world, actual and projected, 1950-2100**

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*



<sup>3</sup> The internationally comparable estimates included in this publication come from *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision* issued by the UNDESA/Population Division, with some differences from China's official data. <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>, accessed August 2017.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, Key findings & advance tables*

## 2. Population Birth

### 2.1 Number of Births

China began to implement family planning policy in the 1970s, and the government toughened family planning regulations in 1980 with the promotion of the one child policy<sup>5</sup>. In just 10 years, the total fertility rate (TFR) among women in China dropped from 4.77 during the 1970-1975 period to 2.55 during the 1980-1985 period. Between 1990 and 1995, the TFR had fallen below the replacement rate of 2.1 and remains at a low level since then. The TFR is estimated at 1.60 for 2010-2015, considered one of the low-fertility countries in the world<sup>6</sup>.

The size and proportion of the child population decreased slightly but remained relatively stable during the 2010-2015 period, which was related to the adjustment of the family planning policy in recent years.

About the adjustment of the family planning policy in recent years: The Government of China issued the *Opinions on Adjusting and Improving Fertility Policy* in January 2014, and proposed major adjustments to China's family planning policy. The most significant change is reflected in the *Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China*, which formerly stated that “**if both parents are only children**, and they have had one child, they can have a second child”. The text has been changed to “**if both parents are only children or if one parent is an only child**, and they have had one child, they can have a second child”. This is now known as the second-child policy. Then at the end of 2015, the policy was further liberalized to realize the universal second-child policy, “promoting all couples to have two children”.

The adjustment of the family planning policy resulted in slight increases in the total number of births in 2014 and 2016 (Figure 5). The number of children born in 2014 increased by 470,000 when compared to 2013. There was a more noticeable increase in 2016, with an increase of 1.31 million births from 2015. The total number of births in 2016 reached 17.86 million, the highest total since the year 2000.

There was a small peak in the total number of births when the family planning policy was “slightly loosened”<sup>7</sup> in the mid-1980s. The children born during this period entered childbearing age since 2010, which could also help explain the slight increases in the total number of births in the last few years.

Figure 5: Total number of births, 1980-2016



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, China Statistical Yearbook, 1980-2010 data; Statistical Communiqué, 2011-2016 data

<sup>5</sup> “An Open Letter to All Communist Party Members and Communist Youth League Members on Control of Population Growth of Our Country” by the CPC Central Committee issued on 25 September 1980, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66677/4493829.html>, accessed May 2017.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Fertility/>, accessed August 2017.

<sup>7</sup> In April 1984, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China approved the State Family Planning Commission’s *Report on the Conditions of the Work of Family Planning*, which recommended “loosening family planning policies in rural areas in accordance with the existing provisions, and allow families to have a second child once approval is granted.” <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66699/4495322.html>, accessed May 2017.

## 2.2 Sex ratio at birth

The sex ratio at birth (SRB) in China<sup>8</sup> began to exceed the global range in the 1980s, and has risen steadily since then, increasing from 108.5 in 1982 to the highest SRB of 118.6 around 2005. Though the sex ratio at birth decreased to 113.5 in 2015 (Figure 6a), China is still the country with the most severely imbalanced SRB in the world<sup>9</sup>.

China's SRB has the following characteristics:

- SRB was higher in rural areas than urban areas, but the urban-rural gap has narrowed since 2010 (Figure 6b).
- SRB rose with the birth order. SRB of the first and second births in 2015 began to move closer towards the normal range, but SRB of the third and subsequent births were severely imbalanced (Figure 6c).
- The degree of imbalance in SRB differs across regions. SRB in seven provinces and autonomous regions including Shanghai was within 107, while SRB in provinces such as Guangxi, Hunan and Guangdong was still seriously imbalanced (Figure 6d).
- The SRB of ethnic minority groups was lower than that of the Han ethnic majority. SRB among ethnic minorities remained within the upper limit of the normal range until 1989. Since then it has continually increased, reaching 110.7 in 2015, but lower than 114.8 in 2010.
- SRB was inversely correlated with the level of education received by women of childbearing age; the lower the education level of women of childbearing age, the higher the sex ratio of their new-borns.

The direct and indirect factors that resulted in high SRB include son preference and corresponding sex-selection practices, the influence of the family-planning policy, unequal social and family status of females, and incomplete coverage and access of social security system, particularly in rural areas and certain provinces. This highlights the extent to which girls are denied the right to life and reflects deep-seated sex discrimination that adversely affects girls' development, including fuelling trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence. Additionally, due to long-term SRB imbalance, there were 34 million fewer women than men. This imbalance also has implications for the ability of men to find spouses, known as the "marriage squeeze" phenomenon, and it will have a far-reaching effect on future population development.

### (6d) Sex ratio at birth by province, 2015

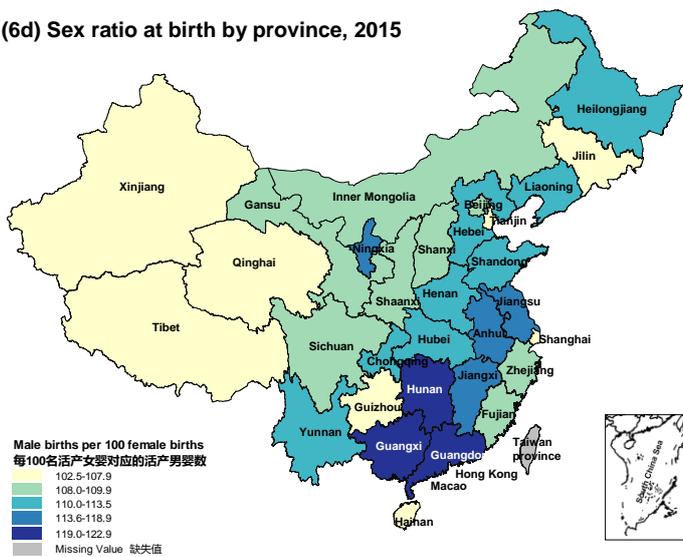
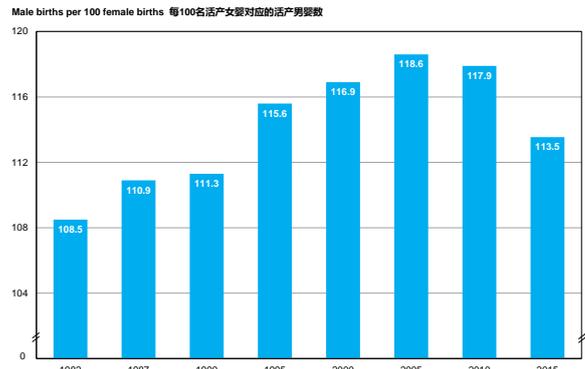
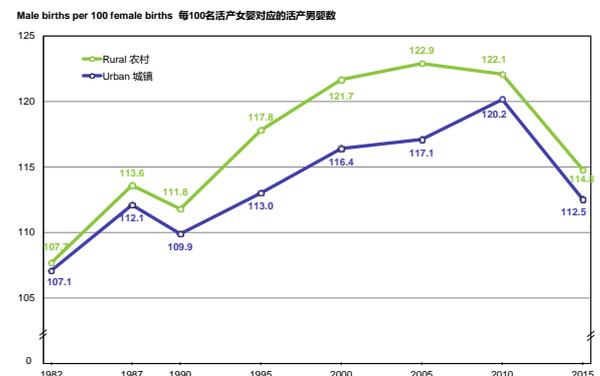


Figure 6: Sex ratio at birth, 1982-2015 \*

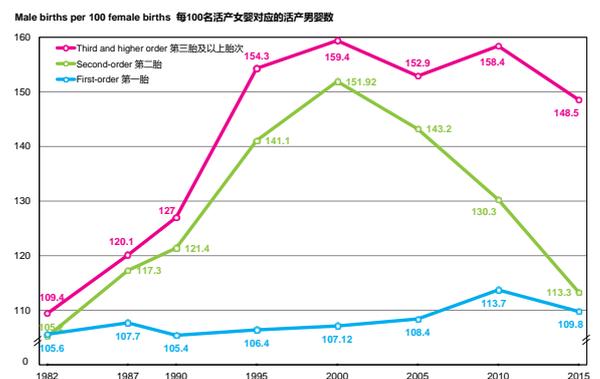
### (6a) Sex ratio at birth, national



### (6b) Sex ratio at birth, urban and rural



### (6c) Sex ratio at birth by birth order



Sources: Population Censuses and 1% Population Sample Surveys conducted by National Bureau of Statistics

\*Note: National and provincial-level data are from the short-form of the Census, while data by urban-rural residence and by birth order are from the long-form of the Census.

<sup>8</sup> Sex ratio at birth refers to the number of live male births corresponding to every 100 live female births. In the absence of intervention, sex ratio at birth lies between 103 and 107.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Fertility/>, accessed August 2017.

### 3. Composition of child population

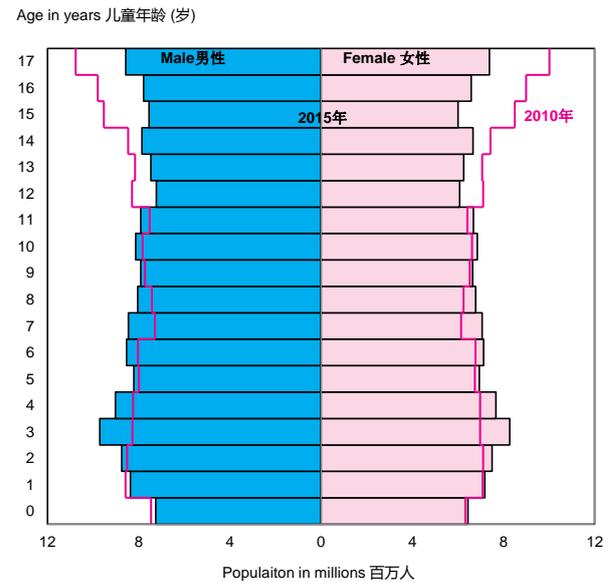
#### 3.1 Age Structure

##### Age Structure of Children

There were 95.31 million children in the preschool stage (0-5 years), 132 million children in the compulsory education stage (6-14 years) and 43.87 million children in the senior secondary stage (15-17 years) in 2015 (Annex 1). As compared to 2010, there were 5.05 million more children in the preschool stage, around the same number of children in the compulsory education stage, and 13.72 million fewer children in the senior secondary stage (Figure 7). The changes in the size of the child population at different developmental stages have great implications for educational infrastructure, human resources and planning.

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Census, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Figure 7: Pyramid of child population aged 0-17, 2010 and 2015



##### Overall Changes to the Population Age Structure

China saw rapid changes in the age structure of its population in the 15-year period since 2000, with the child population and its proportion to the total population in decline. Concurrently, the size and proportion of youths and adolescents was also in decline (Annex 2). The proportion of young people aged 10-19 dropped from 18.0% in 2000 to 10.6% in 2015. The proportion of young people aged 15-24 dropped from 15.6% in 2000 to 12.8% in 2015. The significant reduction in the total number of young people aged 10-19 in 2015 was because they were born between 1996 and 2005, at a time when the overall population was in decline (see Figure 5: Total Number of Births).

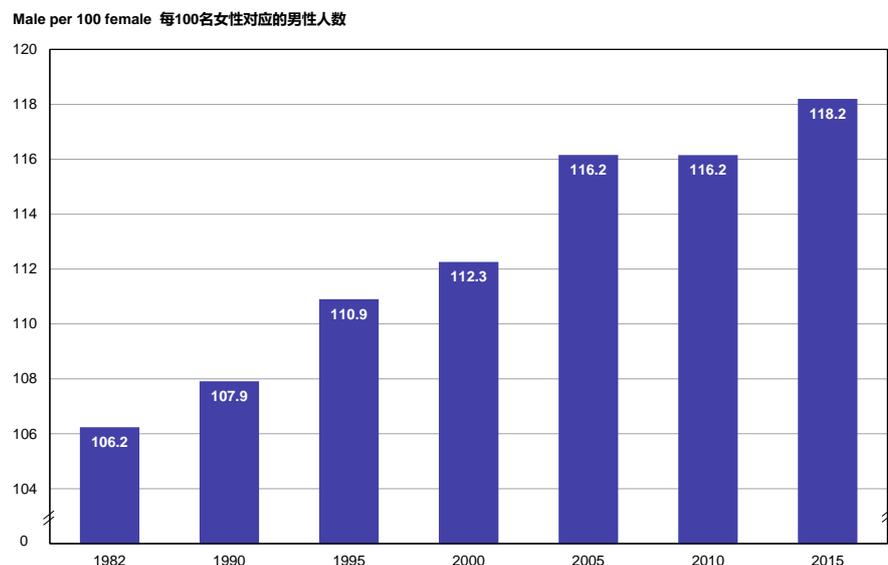
At the same time, China has noted the trend of an aging population<sup>10</sup> since 2000. The proportion of the population aged 60 and above rose by 3 percentage points between 2000 and 2010, increased by 3 percentage points in the five years between 2010 and 2015, and has reached 16.2% in 2015 (Annex 2).

#### 3.2 Gender Composition

There were 147 million males compared to 124 million females, accounting for 54.2% and 45.8% of the child population respectively in 2015. There were 22.59 million more male children than female children.

The long-term imbalance in SRB has been reflected in the sex ratio of the child population. Since 1980s, the sex ratio of boys to girls in China has continually increased. From 1982 to 2015, the sex ratio of the child population rose from 106.2 to 118.2 males per 100 females. The imbalanced sex ratio of the child population in some provinces has been exceptionally severe, while Hainan, Henan, Jiangxi, Gansu, Shandong, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Anhui and Hunan each exceeded 120 in 2015 (Annex 3).

Figure 8: Sex ratio of children aged 0-17, 1982-2015



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

<sup>10</sup> Globally, a population is defined as “aged” if people aged 60 years and above account for more than 10 per cent, or people aged 65 years and above account for more than 7 per cent of the total population.

### 3.3 Urban and Rural Distribution

There were 133 million children in urban areas, accounting for 49.1%, and 138 million children in rural areas, accounting for 50.9% of the child population.

**Figure 9: Size and proportion of children aged 0-17 in urban and rural areas, 1982-2015**

	Total Population Urbanization Rate (%)	Child Population ( million )			Percentage of children that is urban (%)
		Urban	Rural	Total	
1982	21.1	68.08	342	410	16.6
1990	26.4	81.51	301	383	21.3
2000	36.2	107	238	345	31.1
2010	50.0	124	154	279	44.6
2015	56.1	133	138	271	49.1

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, *China Statistical Yearbook*, 2016; 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

China has seen rapid urbanization since the Government's reform and opening-up. The national urban population increased from 21.1% in 1982 to 56.1% in 2015, while the proportion of urban children increased from 16.6% in 1982 to 49.1% in 2015. In other words, nearly half of the country's children lived in urban areas. Although the child population has continually declined since 1982, the child population in urban areas has been steadily increasing with urbanization. The proportion of urban children in 2015 has doubled compared with the figure in 1982. In contrast, the proportion of rural children has been rapidly declining.

The percentage of children that is urban is always lower than the urbanization rate of the total population. This is closely related to the higher fertility rate and the larger proportion of children in rural areas. Moreover, this may also be linked to migrant children in cities facing restricted access to public services and their parents having no choice but to leave them behind in rural areas.

### 3.4 Ethnic Minority Children

In 2015, the population of ethnic minority children aged 0-17 years was 31.11 million, slightly more than that in 2010, with a population increase of 480,000. Two main factors have led to a gradual increase in the proportion of ethnic minority children, from 7.6% in 1982 to 11.5% in 2015. Firstly, the Government of China has adopted a relatively liberal family planning policy for ethnic minorities and the TFR of ethnic minorities is higher than the national average. Secondly, parents are more likely to register their children as ethnic minorities from interethnic marriages, in order for them to benefit from relevant preferential policies.

The population of different ethnic minority groups varies. The 10 ethnic minorities with the largest population are Zhuang, Uygur, Hui, Yi, Miao, Tujia, Manchu, Tibetan, Mongolian and Buyi, with a total population of 25.07 million, accounting for 80.6% of the total population of ethnic minorities. Zhuang children made up the largest ethnic minority child population, totaling 4.45 million and accounting for 14.3% of all ethnic minority children. Aside from the Buyi ethnic minority group, which had 890,000 million children, the other nine ethnic minority groups each had more than one million children.

**Figure 10: Total population and child population, by Han and Ethnic Minority, 1982-2015**

	National (million)	Han (million)	Ethnic Minority (million)	Proportion of Ethnic Minority (%)
<b>Total Population</b>				
1982	1008	941	67.30	6.7
1990	1134	1042	91.20	8.0
2000	1266	1159	106	8.4
2010	1340	1226	114	8.5
2015	1375	1257	117	8.5
<b>Child Population</b>				
1982	410	379	31.13	7.6
1990	383	345	37.42	9.8
2000	345	310	35.39	10.3
2010	279	248	30.63	11.0
2015	271	240	31.11	11.5

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, *China Statistical Yearbook*, 2016; 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

### 3.5 Children living in poverty-stricken areas

In 2015, a total of 65 million<sup>11</sup> children (about 24% of the child population nationwide) were found to be living in poverty-stricken areas (832 counties in total, including “key poverty counties” and counties in “poverty blocks”). Of these children, a relatively low 32% lived in urban areas (compared to the national percentage of children that is urban being 49.1%) and a significant 68% lived in rural poor areas, facing multiple challenges with regards to their survival and development.

There were 9.66 million migrant children in poverty-stricken areas in 2015, with a migrant participation rate<sup>12</sup> of 15.9%, 2.5 percentage points higher than in 2010 (13.4%) and higher than the national average (12.6%). Data shows that 57.1% of migrant children from poverty-stricken areas moved to non-poor areas with their parents to seek more pathways out of poverty.

There were 13.66 million children left-behind in poverty-stricken rural areas, accounting for 30.9% of rural children in poverty-stricken areas. This is slightly higher than the proportion of children left-behind among all children living in rural areas.

Child poverty is multi-dimensional. Children in poverty-stricken areas lagged behind other children in terms of health, education, living conditions and other dimensions. The mortality rate of children in poverty-stricken areas was higher than the national average in all age groups. In 2015, 5.4% of children in poverty-stricken areas failed to receive or complete compulsory education, 1.8 percentage points higher than the national average. Late school enrollment is also more prevalent among children in poverty-stricken areas. Household latrine coverage of children in poverty-stricken areas (60.3%) was significantly lower than the national average (80.1%). In addition, early marriage and early pregnancy were more common among adolescents aged 15-19 years in poverty-stricken areas.

### 3.6 Children without a registered residence

The population of people without a registered residence<sup>13</sup> (*hukou*) in China was large and has grown between 2000 and 2010: from 8 million people in 2000 to 13.76 million in 2010, accounting for 0.6% and 1% of the total population, respectively. In 2010, 89.8% of the population of people without a registered residence were children aged 0-17 years, totalling 12.36 million and accounting for 4.4% of the total child population. Of this 12.36 million children, 70.3% resided in rural areas, and were mainly young children. Many older children received *hukou* registration once they began primary school among other reasons.

Due to the vigorous national efforts to improve *hukou* registration since 2010, the population without a registered residence has reduced. As indicated in the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey, the total number of people without a registered residence dropped to 5.75 million. Among them, 4.34 million were children aged 0-17, accounting for a lower percentage of 75.6% among all people without a *hukou* in comparison with 2010. The children without a registered residence were further concentrated at a younger age, with children aged 0-5 representing 89% of the total children. Moreover, the proportion of children living in rural areas without a *hukou* has decreased significantly to less than 50% in 2015.

**Figure 11: Population characteristics of children without a registered residence, 2000, 2010 and 2015**

	2000	2010	2015
Total number of people without a registered residence (million)	7.98	13.76	5.75
Proportion of the total population	0.6%	1.0%	0.4%
Total number of children without a registered residence (million)	6.35	12.36	4.34
Proportion of the total child population aged 0-17	1.8%	4.4%	1.6%
Proportion of children without a registered residence in rural areas	75.5%	70.3%	44.5%
<b>Age Composition (%)</b>			
Age 0	30.2	33.2	40.2
Age 1-2	18.5	26.5	18.3
Age 3-5	16.0	17.2	8.8
Age 6-17	18.4	13.0	8.3
Age 18 and above	16.9	10.2	24.4

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

<sup>11</sup> The total child population living in the 832 poverty-stricken counties was 65 million, but not all of them are considered poor children living below the poverty standard, and not all poor children reside in poverty-stricken counties. In 2015, there were 55.75 million people living below the national poverty standard for rural areas (the standard was 2,300 yuan per person per year at 2010 price), accounting for 5.7% of the total rural population. In the same period, the incidence of poverty among all rural children was 7.1% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016 *China Rural Poverty Monitoring Report*, published 2016), roughly estimated at 15 million poor children. The incidence of child poverty was greater than the incidence of poverty in the overall population, which showed that poverty has a greater impact on children.

<sup>12</sup> Migrant participation rate refers to the proportion of the migrant population to the total population in a particular age group.

<sup>13</sup> Population without a registered residence refers to several scenarios, including people who have not yet registered with *hukou* after birth, or people who have moved out of their originally registered residence, and yet to register their *hukou* in new places.

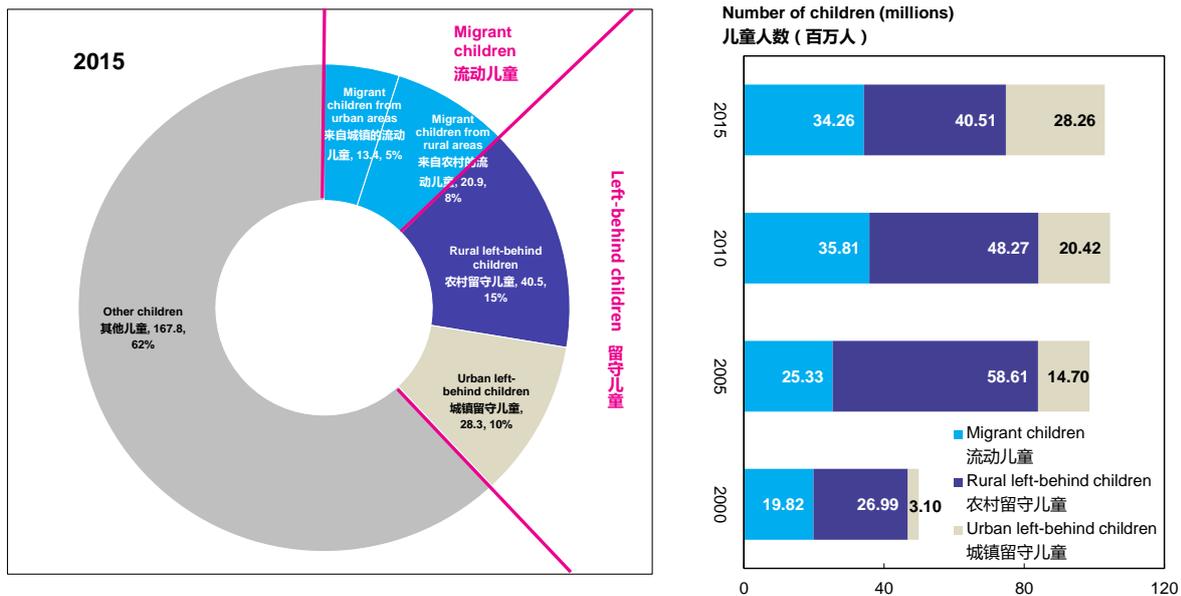
#### 4. Children affected by migration<sup>14</sup>

China has been experiencing large-scale population migration, with the migrant population increasing from 221 million in 2010 to 247 million in 2015. This has and continues to affect children – both those that are left behind in their hometowns while one or both parents migrate, and those that travel with their migrant parents.

##### 4.1 Size

In 2015, the number of migrant children was 34.26 million, and the number of left-behind children was 68.77 million. Adding these two groups together, the total number of children affected by migration was 103 million, accounting for 38% of the total child population in China. That is, about 4 out of every 10 children in China were directly affected by migration. While the number of children affected by migration decreased slightly in 2015, as compared to 2010 (1.48 million fewer children), due to the corresponding decline in the size of China's child population; the 103 million children affected by migration still remained sizeable.

Figure 12: Number and composition of migrant and left-behind children, 2000-2015



Note: In the doughnut chart the first number refers to the child population in millions; the second refers to its share of the total child population. Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2005 and 2015 1% National Population Sample Surveys

It is worth noting the change in structure among children affected by migration: the population of migrant children and rural children left-behind in 2015 were both in decline, while the number of urban children left-behind increased. On one hand, this is consistent with the structural change of rural-urban population along with the development of urbanization, and reflects the initial change brought about by the well-implemented policy on encouraging rural population to register in urban areas. On the other hand, a small number of children left-behind in rural areas, due to *in situ* urbanization, are now categorized as left-behind children residing in urban areas.

Although left-behind children in rural areas continue to be a group of policy focus, the size of urban children left-behind keeps growing along with further urbanization, which indicates urban children left-behind deserve increased attention. The initial migrant population in China mainly came from rural areas, therefore, migrant children are usually taken as children from rural areas, and children left-behind are normally referring to rural children left-behind. In the recent decade, the number of urban left-behind children rapidly reached 28.26 million in 2015 from initially unnoticed, accounting for 41.1% of the total number of left-behind children. The proportion of urban left-behind children is anticipated to continue increasing in the coming years. However, the existing policies focusing on left-behind children almost all target at those left-behind in rural areas. The government should proceed with designing the policy framework for urban children left-behind.

In 2015, the impacts of migration were still felt more by children from rural areas. This translates into 20.87 million migrant children from rural areas (*hukou* registered in rural areas), accounting for 60.9% of all migrant children. The number of left-behind children in rural areas reached 40.51 million<sup>15,16</sup>, accounting for 58.9% of all left-behind children and 29.4% of all rural

<sup>14</sup> For more information about children affected by migration, refer to Part 5 Family structure and child-rearing, and Part 6 Status of children and adolescents education of this publication.

<sup>15</sup> In most discussions of "left-behind children", the reference is to left-behind children living in rural areas, and this is the group that this publication also gives more focuses.

<sup>16</sup> In February 2016, the State Council issued the *Opinions on Strengthening Care and Protection of Rural Left-behind Children*. Subsequently, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the *Notice on Implementation of the Survey on Rural Left-behind Children*, and carried out the work nationwide between March-July 2016. The data showed that the number of rural children left-behind in the country was 9.02 million. It is important to note that the survey did not use the normal definition of children left-behind, which states that "at least one parent is a migrant worker, and the child is under the age of 18". The

children, which means that 3 out of every 10 children in rural areas were left-behind.

The proportion of migrant children in 2015 was 12.6%, which was less than the proportion of the total migrant population (17.9%). The concentration of migrant children in urban areas is high, as evidenced by the fact that 28.96 million migrant children were living in urban areas, accounting for 84.8% of all migrant children. The proportion of migrant children among urban children was 21.8%, which means that 1 out of every 5 children in urban areas was a migrant child.

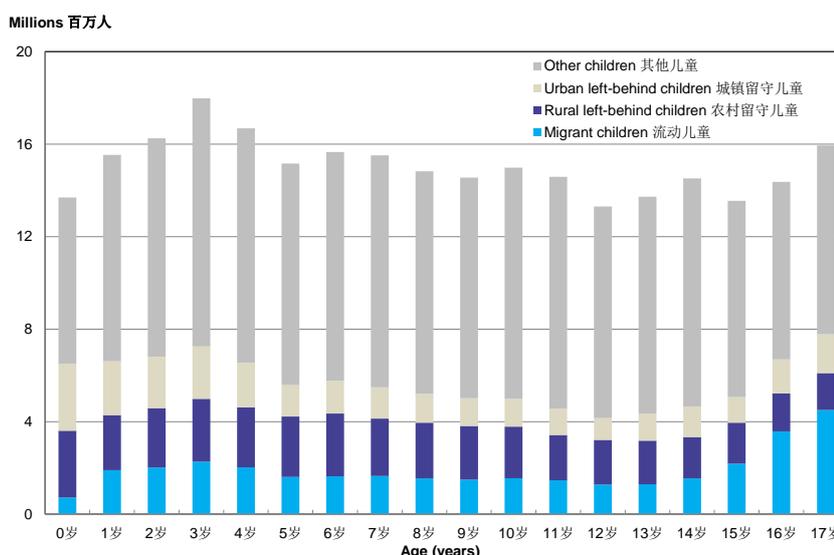
Children affected by migration face a series of challenges to their development. Migrant children lose access to traditional and community support systems, and are confronted with difficulties and discrimination in terms of urban schooling, medical treatment, social security and other aspects. As for left-behind children, with one or both parents working away from home, it is difficult for them to receive emotional support and help with studies from their families, which can be detrimental to their physical, emotional and mental health. These challenges require adequate social and policy responses.

#### 4.2 Age

With the changes in the age structure of all children, the distribution of school-age migrant children in 2015 was also significantly different from that in 2010 (Annex 4). In 2015, migrant children were generally younger or older in age, with fewer migrant children with ages in between. Children left-behind in rural areas were of younger ages, accounting for about three quarters of children in preschools and primary schools (Figure 13).

The number of migrant preschool children aged 0-5 years in 2015 increased by 1.56 million, and the migrant participation rate was higher than that in 2010. This means that migrant children had increased demands for child care services. The number of migrant children aged 15-17 years in senior secondary schools was 10.26 million, a decrease of 2.64 million from 2010. The significant decrease was mainly due to the large reduction in the total population of this age group, with a decrease of 13.70 million children. If the reduction is controlled for, the migrant population of this age group did not decrease but increased. Correspondingly, the migrant participation rate of children aged 15-17 years in 2015 (23.4%) was actually higher than that of 2010 (22.4%).

**Figure 13: The number of migrant children and children left-behind by age, 2015**

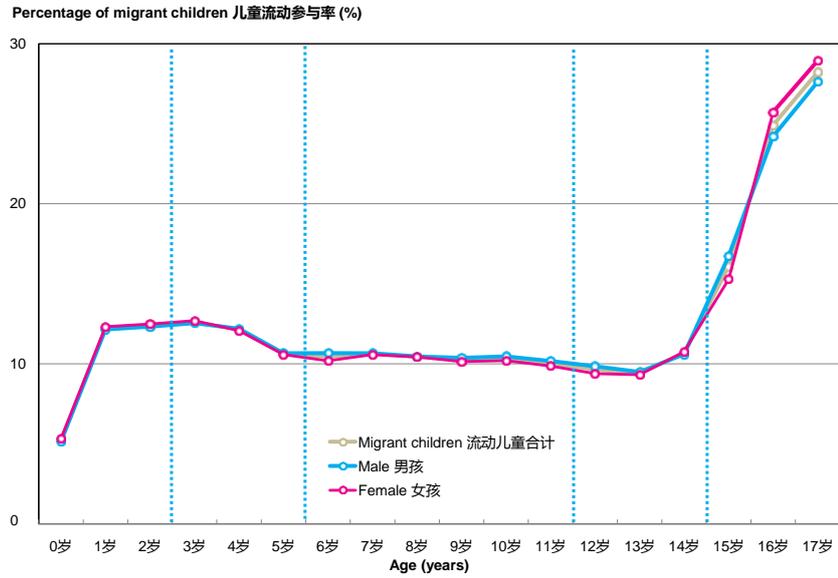


Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Participation rates among migrant populations has a strong age pattern, demonstrating the barriers associated with *hukou* and the restrictive access to public services: (1) migrant children under one-year old have the lowest participation rate, and migrant children aged 1 have a slightly higher participation rate. This indicates that many migrant women may return to their hometown when they are pregnant, and when their children are a little older, they will bring them along when they migrate for work; (2) the participation rate of school-age children has declined, especially in 2015, and the participation rate of children in junior secondary schools is lower than that in primary schools, indicating the barriers to attend schools in the migration destinations and take the college entrance examination also inhibit the participation rates of migrant children; (3) migrant children aged 15-17 years have significantly higher participation rates, with the participation rate of migrant children aged 17 years are as high as 28.3%. This indicated that once rural children complete their compulsory education, if they do not attend senior secondary school or they drop-out, it is likely they will decide to migrate for work and join the new generation of migrant workers who are faced with a series of barriers, including social integration.

definition used by the Ministry of Civil Affairs during the survey states that "both parents are migrant workers, or one parent is a migrant worker and the other parent lacks child supervision ability, and the child is under the age of 16".

**Figure 14: Migrant participation rate of children, by age, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

**4.3 Sex**

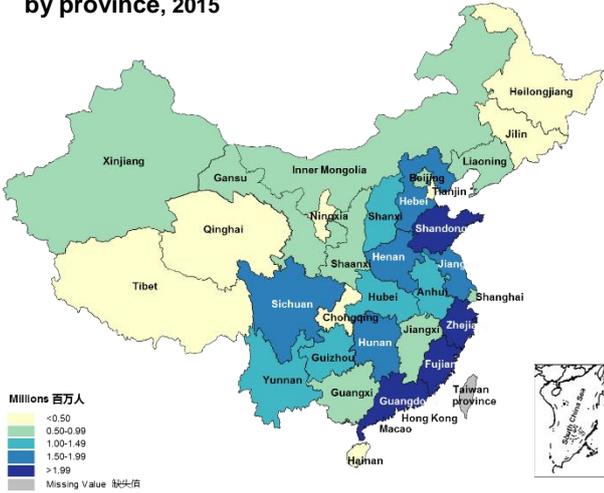
In 2015, the migrant population did not demonstrate a significant "preference for boys" as they did in 2010 when they migrated with their children. In Figure 14, the migrant participation rate of girls in all age groups was similar to that of migrant boys, indicating there were equal opportunities for both girls and boys to migrate with their parents and receive better care and benefits from urban resources.

**4.4 Distribution of migrant children and rural children left-behind**

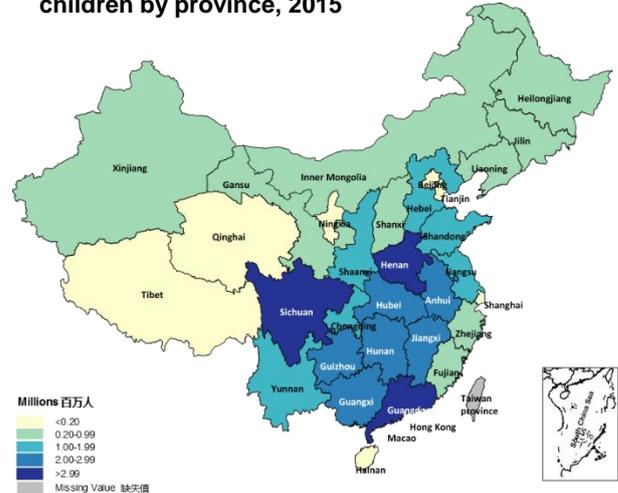
Migrant children and rural children left-behind were concentrated in a few provinces, some are big provinces in terms of containing both large number of migrant children and left-behind children (Figure 15a and Figure 15b). In 2015, nine provinces had migrant child populations of more than 1.50 million, with a total number of 19.32 million, accounting for 56.3% of migrant children in the whole country.

Nine provinces had more than 2 million children left-behind in rural areas, with a total number of 26.72 million, accounting for 66% of all rural children left-behind. Among the nine provinces, Henan, Sichuan and Guangdong provinces had populations of rural children left-behind that exceeded 3 million. Henan province had the largest number of children left-behind in rural areas, reaching 5.62 million. In some provinces, such as Chongqing, Sichuan and Hubei, the proportion of rural children left-behind was quite high, accounting for more than 40% of the total number of rural children.

**Figure 15a: Number of migrant children by province, 2015**



**Figure 15b: Number of rural left-behind children by province, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

**4.5 Migration flow**

Looking at the flow of migrant populations based on administrative areas, 34.1% of children were migrating to other townships within their counties (intra-county migration); 37.1% were migrating to other cities or counties within their provinces (intra-province migration); and 28.8% were migrating to other provinces (inter-province migration). In terms of administrative areas, municipalities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin were mainly composed of migrant children from inter-province migration. Shandong, Hebei, Shanxi, Jiangxi, Hubei were mainly composed of migrant children from intra-county migration. Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu provinces attracted a considerable number of children from inter-province migration, and because of uneven regional economic development within the provinces, these provinces also had a large proportion of migrant children from intra-province migration.

The migration distance among children of different age groups showed varying patterns and changed with time. Unlike 2000 and 2005, the proportion of inter-province migration among older school age children in 2010 and 2015 was smaller. In 2000 and 2005, completion of senior secondary school education was also relatively uncommon, because many rural children would join the migrant workforce once they completed the nine-year compulsory education. With the development and advancement of senior secondary school and higher education in the past ten years, the Government of China has taken several positive measures to resolve the issues associated with migrant children's education<sup>17</sup>. However, inter-provincial migrant children who have completed compulsory education continued to face barriers to access senior secondary school education and to participate in the college entrance examination, and many returned to their home provinces where they had a registered residence.

#### 4.6 Migration Duration and Experience

Contrary to common misperception, most migrant children lived and studied in the places to which they had migrated for a long period of time. In 2015, the average duration of migration was 4 years, slightly longer than the 3.7 years in 2010. Of the migrant children aged 8-13 years, more than 50% in the single-year age groups had a migration period of over 5 years.

The situation of migrant children and children left-behind was not fixed, and has seen to have changed because of family situation, the age of the child, and the stage of education. In 2015, approximately 6% of rural children left-behind had migrated with their parents in the past. The highest percentage of past migration experience was among rural children left-behind of senior secondary school age (about 15%).

## 5. Family structure and child-rearing

### 5.1 Families with children

The size of families in China is shrinking, from 3.4 persons per family in 2000 to 3.1 persons per family in 2015. Moreover, the number of families with children is declining, and the number of children in a given family is also changing (Figure 16).

In 2015, there were 410 million families in China, of which 185 million families (45%) had children aged 0-17. The proportion of children in all of China's provinces varied significantly. Only one-quarter of households in Shanghai had children in 2015, and only one-third of households in Beijing and Tianjin had children. In contrast, central and western provinces, and provinces with high concentrations of ethnic minorities had high proportion of families with children, including Tibet where more than 60% of families had children.

Families with only one child accounted for 65.6% of all families with children, while families with two children accounted for 28.4%, and families with three or more children accounted for the remaining 6.0%. In urban areas, 72.4% of families with children had only one child, while in rural areas, this proportion was 57.6%.

**Figure 16: National distribution of families with children, 2000, 2010 and 2015**

	Family size (# of persons)	Proportion of families with children (%)	Distribution by number of children ( % )			
			One	Two	Three or more	Total
2000	3.4	63.4	59.3	30.8	9.9	100
2010	3.1	47.2	66.6	27.3	6.1	100
2015	3.1	45.0	65.6	28.4	6.0	100

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

### 5.2 Child-rearing

In terms of child rearing, in 2015, 64.7% of children lived with both parents, 19.6% of children lived with one parent, 15.7% of children could not live with either parent. There is no gender difference in this pattern.

It is estimated that 95.60 million children did not live with both parents in 2015 due to various reasons, increasing by 11 million from 2010. The majority of children not living with both parents were children affected by migration, including 40.51 million rural left-behind children, 28.26 urban left-behind children and 18.84 million migrant children who did not live with both parents, accounting for more than 90% in total.

<sup>17</sup> As early as 1998, the State Education Commission (Ministry of Education at that time) and the Ministry of Public Security promulgated the *Interim Measure of School Education for Temporary Migrant Children and Adolescents*, and put forward two main practices to ensure access to compulsory education, focusing on the local government and the public schools in the migration destinations. The *Compulsory Education Law*, which was amended in 2006, specifically indicated that migrant children are entitled to equal access to the nine years of compulsory education. The *National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* also reiterated the need to focus on local government efforts in the migration destinations and the efforts put forth by full-time public primary and secondary schools to resolve the issue of migrant children's education.

**Figure 17: Structure of children's families, 2015**

	All children	Boys	Girls	Rural children left-behind	Urban children left-behind	Migrant children	Ethnic minority children	Children in poverty-stricken areas
<b>Size ( million )</b>	271	147	124	40.51	28.26	34.26	30.88	65.00
Living situation ( % )								
<b>Living with both parents</b>	64.7	65.1	64.4	-	-	45.0	68.2	63.9
<b>Not living with both parents</b>	35.3	34.9	35.6	100	100	55.0	31.8	36.1
Living with father	9.1	9.1	9.1	20.4	25.1	9.1	9.4	8.6
#father divorced or widowed	2.1	2.2	2.1	-		1.5	2.2	2.9
Living with mother	10.5	10.3	10.7	30.6	31.1	8.8	8.8	11.4
#mother divorced or widowed	1.4	1.4	1.5	-		2.8	1.2	1.5
Living with grandparents	5.5	5.7	5.3	26.3	12.5	2.1	4.5	8.2
Living alone	0.7	0.8	0.7	3.3	1.6	0.7	0.8	1.1
Living with other children	3.3	3.0	3.6	7.0	6.9	10.9	2.1	2.8
Living with other adults	6.1	6.0	6.3	12.5	22.8	23.4	6.2	4.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Approximately 51% of rural children left-behind lived with one of the parents, 26.3% lived with their grandparents, and 12.5% lived with other adults. Moreover, 10.3% of rural children left-behind lived alone or with other children, making their safety, health, living and learning conditions particular concerns.

Data shows that 45% of migrant children lived with their parents, 17.9% live with one of their parents, and 2.1% live with their grandparents. In addition, a considerable proportion of migrant children (34.3%) lived with 'other people' rather than parents or grandparents, potentially because some of these children were attending school or working outside their hometown.

Another reason why children cannot live with both parents was divorce or the loss of a parent. In 2015, 3.5% of children in the country were living with only one parent because of divorce or widowhood, accounting for 10% of all children who cannot live with both parents. For children living in poverty-stricken areas, the proportion of children living with their single fathers due to divorce or widowhood was high, accounting for 2.9% of all children in rural poverty-stricken areas. The proportion of migrant children living with single mothers was also relatively high, accounting for 2.8% of all migrant children.

Different child-rearing arrangements may have different effects on children's development. Evidence has shown that children living with their mothers usually received better parenting and care. For young children, the absence of mothers was one of the key factors that contributed to cognitive delay<sup>18</sup>, and mother-child separation was not conducive to the promotion of breastfeeding and child nutrition. For school-age children, mothers' care was shown to be more positive for the children's academic performance<sup>19</sup>. The 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey data indicated that many young children did not live with their mothers. Nationally, 27.3% of children aged 0-2 years were cared for by caregivers other than their mothers, and over 60% of rural left-behind children aged 0-2 years were separated from their mothers. For school-age children, rural children left-behind who lived with their mothers had lower drop-out rates for primary and junior secondary school. The proportion of these children who did not receive or complete compulsory education in accordance with regulations was 3.1%, better than that of other child-rearing arrangements (4.3%).

Grandparents are the main caregivers of left-behind children, especially younger left-behind children. In rural areas, 26.3% of left-behind children were taken care of by their grandparents after both parents migrated. An additional 30.3% of children left behind by one migrant parent lived with the remaining parent and grandparents. The average age of these grandparents was 60 years, with over 80% of them reporting good health. However, these grandparents typically had limited schooling, with more than half receiving only primary-level education. More than half of the grandparents, in addition to taking care of their grandchildren, worked and were responsible for ensuring livelihood. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for left-behind children to receive adequate care. When looking at the amount of time in which children received care, a study about the care economy showed that when grandparents were the caregivers, children aged 0-6 years received 10 fewer hours of care per week than if their parents were the caregivers<sup>20</sup>.

The lack of parental involvement can be extremely detrimental to the growth and development of children. When developing and improving child care and family policies, more attention needs to be given to children living alone, children living in single-parent households, children of migrant families, and children left-behind.

<sup>18</sup> Rural Education Action Program (REAP), [http://reap.fsi.stanford.edu/zh-ch/publications?type=policy\\_brief](http://reap.fsi.stanford.edu/zh-ch/publications?type=policy_brief), accessed May 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Wu Yingxiong, Du Kangli, "The Impact of Parents' Migration on the Academic Performance of Left-behind Children – from Gender Perspective", *Special Zone Economy*, April 2014

<sup>20</sup> Chang Hongqin, Dong Xiaoyuan, "Childcare Arrangements and Care Deficits in Rural China", to be published.

### 5.3 Household Water and Sanitation Facilities

The water and sanitation conditions in households have greatly improved between 2000 and 2015. In 2000, 45.7% of the households had tap water facilities. This proportion increased to 64.6% in 2010, indicating that access to household tap water facilities had been expanded to additional one-fifth of the country's households within ten years<sup>21</sup>. In 2000, 72% of households in the country had toilets, this proportion increased to 79.7% in 2015. The function and quality of the household toilets have also been improved, with the proportion of households with flush toilets at 55.7% in 2015, a significant increase from 18.7% in 2000.

The coverage rate of water and sanitation facilities in families with children was slightly lower than that of other households in 2000 and 2010, but this gap has narrowed or almost disappeared in 2015. While water and sanitation facilities are steadily being improved, it should be noted that one-fifth of children still lived in homes without household toilets in 2015.

The gap between urban and rural sanitation is enormous. In rural areas, 33.2% of households did not have toilets in 2015, with only 29% of households with flush toilets. In contrast, in urban areas, 75.9% of households had flush toilets. The situation is worse in poor rural areas, where 42% of households did not have toilets and the coverage rate of flush toilets was as low as 18.5%.

## 6. Status of child and adolescent education

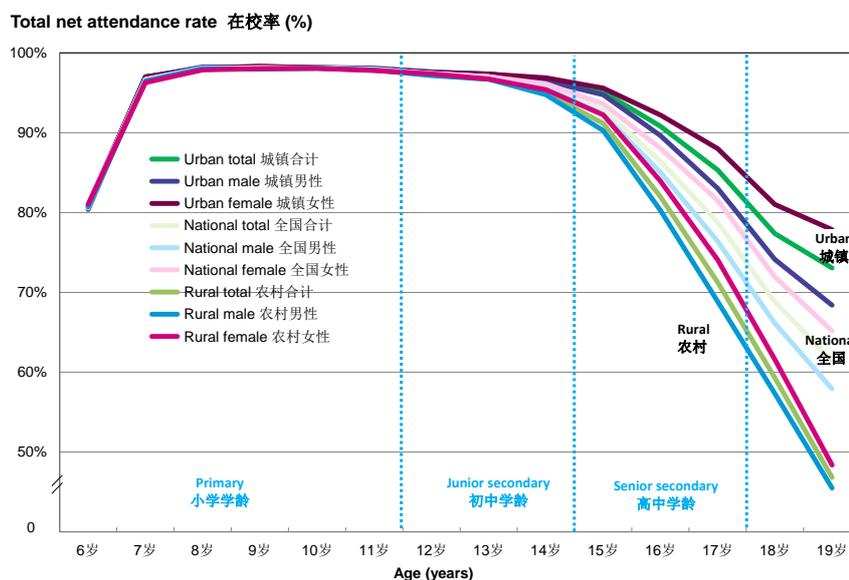
### 6.1 Status and progress

Similar to the status in 2010, there was no obvious urban-rural or sex difference in terms of children's school attendance rate<sup>22</sup> at the compulsory education stage in 2015. However, as children get older, especially at senior secondary school age and during adolescence, their school attendance rate fell gradually, and the urban-rural disparity became prominent. The education level of girls, especially urban girls, was better than that of boys (Figure 18). This trend is also reflected in other educational indicators, such as proportion of over-age students and completion rates (Annex 5).

In the 15-year period since 2000, China has realized universalization of junior secondary school education and made significant leaps in improving access to senior secondary school education. Today, nine years of compulsory education has achieved universal access, and has entered a new stage focused on education quality and balanced development<sup>23</sup>. The enrollment rate in senior secondary school has increased from 55.6% in 2000 to 80.6% in 2010, and 85.6% in 2015. This has laid a good foundation for accelerating the universalization of senior secondary school education during the 13th Five-Year Plan period.

There are still many barriers and challenges in the education system in China. The inequality between urban and rural areas, between Han and ethnic minority children, and between specific vulnerable groups still require further attention. Moreover, there are still a considerable number of children who are not in school, and over-age school enrollment among children and adolescents is still common.

**Figure 18: School attendance rate of children and adolescents aged 6-19, by age and urban-rural residence, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

<sup>21</sup> The Census and 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey both asked about information regarding water and sanitation facilities within the household. The 2015 Sample Survey did not collect information on household water use.

<sup>22</sup> If not specified, attendance rate means "total net attendance rate", which is the total number of students of the official age group for a given level of education who are attending school at any level of education, expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population (UNESCO).

<sup>23</sup> National 13th Five Year Plan on Education, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-01/19/content\\_5161341.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-01/19/content_5161341.htm), accessed May 2017.

## 6.2 Gaps between different groups

The disparities in education access between urban and rural areas, within specific regions, and between Han and ethnic minorities are still apparent. Between 2000 and 2015, in terms of school attendance, receiving and completion of compulsory education<sup>24</sup>, rural areas lagged behind urban areas, rural poverty-stricken areas were worse off than rural areas, and ethnic minority children performed poorer than Han children. When compared with Han children, more than two times as many ethnic minority children aged 6-17 did not access compulsory education in accordance with the regulations. The rates of school attendance amongst rural left-behind children were better than other rural children. More migrant children attended or completed compulsory education in accordance with the regulations when compared with other rural children. However because some older migrant children joined the migrant workforce, their overall school attendance rate was low (Figure 19).

**Figure 19: School attendance rate and proportion of children aged 6-17 who failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required, 2000, 2010 and 2015**

		Failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required (%)			Attendance rate (%)		
		2000	2010	2015	2000	2010	2015
<b>Children aged 6-17</b>		7.1	3.0	3.6	86.1	91.8	93.0
Urban/rural	Urban	3.9	2.0	3.0	90.1	93.7	94.2
	Rural	8.6	3.9	4.1	84.4	90.3	91.9
	Rural poverty-stricken areas	-	5.8	5.4	-	88.9	90.3
Gender	Male	6.3	3.1	3.7	87.1	91.6	92.6
	Female	8.1	3.0	3.5	85.1	92.1	93.4
Ethnicity	Han	6.1	2.7	3.1	87.2	92.4	93.4
	Ethnic minorities	17.7	7.2	7.4	77.1	87.0	88.1
Children affected by migration	Migrant children	8.4	2.7	3.3	77.6	88.0	90.7
	Rural children left-behind	6.7	3.7	4.1	89.4	91.4	92.7

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

In terms of urban-rural disparity which is more prominent after the compulsory education stage, the school attendance rate of senior secondary school-aged rural children was 81.5%, and lower than that of urban children by 8.3 percentage points; 4.1% of older children aged 15-17 in rural areas failed to receive or complete compulsory education, 3 percentage points lower than that of urban children. Due to different levels of urbanization among provinces, urban-rural education disparity means that there are also educational disparities among provinces. Child education in rural areas in central and western provinces lagged behind significantly, and required attention and focus.

**Figure 20: School attendance rate and proportion of children who failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required, by urban-rural residence, age, sex and migrant status, 2015**

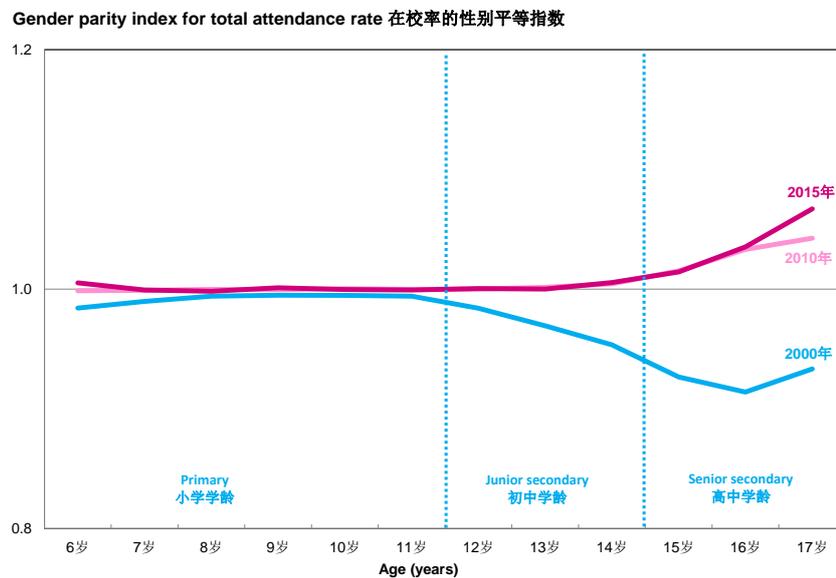
	Total	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Migrant children	Rural left-behind children
<b>Total net attendance rate (%)</b>							
<b>Aged 6-17</b>	<b>93.0</b>	<b>94.2</b>	<b>91.9</b>	<b>92.6</b>	<b>93.4</b>	<b>90.7</b>	<b>92.7</b>
Aged 6-11	94.8	95.0	94.7	94.8	94.8	94.4	94.8
Aged 12-14	96.7	97.2	96.3	96.6	96.8	96.3	96.4
Aged 15-17	85.6	89.8	81.5	84.2	87.3	84.9	82.9
<b>Failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required (%)</b>							
<b>Aged 6-17</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>4.1</b>
Aged 6-11	5.0	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.5	4.9
Aged 12-14	1.6	1.1	2.0	1.6	1.6	2.0	2.2
Aged 15-17	2.6	1.1	4.1	2.8	2.4	1.7	3.9

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

<sup>24</sup> According to the *Compulsory Education Law* of the People's Republic of China promulgated in 1986, children of school age are subject to nine years of compulsory education. In this publication, children who fail to receive or complete compulsory education include those who have never been to school, those who have graduated from primary school only, and those who have dropped out of primary school or junior secondary school.

In terms of gender, girls' access to education at all levels and their completion of compulsory education was lower than that of boys in 2000, but this trend reversed since 2010. Figure 21, which utilizes the gender parity index<sup>25</sup> to characterize changes in gender differences in school attendance between 2000 and 2015, showed that the attendance rates in primary school among boys and girls have been very similar since 2000. The attendance rates in junior secondary school was higher among boys in 2000, however, this difference has disappeared since 2010, with similar attendance rates in junior secondary school among boys and girls. The difference in attendance rates in senior secondary school was even more apparent than for junior secondary school, with boys having obvious advantages over girls in 2000. Thus, the reversal of the 'male advantage' was also more evident in this age group between 2010 and 2015, with the attendance rates of senior secondary school girls higher than that of boys since 2010.

**Figure 21: Gender parity index for attendance rate, 2000, 2010 and 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

### 6.3 Out of school children

Some 7% of all children aged 6-17 years, or an estimated 12.30 million, were out of school. Of this group, 61.3% were in rural areas. Apart from 3 million children aged 6 who had not yet begun schooling, there were 9.30 million children aged 7-17 years who were out of school, including 6.30 million children who were at the age of senior secondary education (aged 15-17 years).

Correspondingly, the attendance rate of senior secondary school students was also relatively low (85.6%), with the attendance rate of rural adolescents aged 19 lower than 50%, indicating that a considerable proportion of children and adolescents had no opportunities to access higher education once they completed compulsory education.

Some 3.6% of children aged 6-17 failed to receive or complete compulsory education, translating into about 6.30 million children, of which 61.5% were in rural areas. Excluding the 3 million children aged 6 years who had not yet begun schooling, 3.30 million children aged 7-17 failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required.

### 6.4 Over-age students

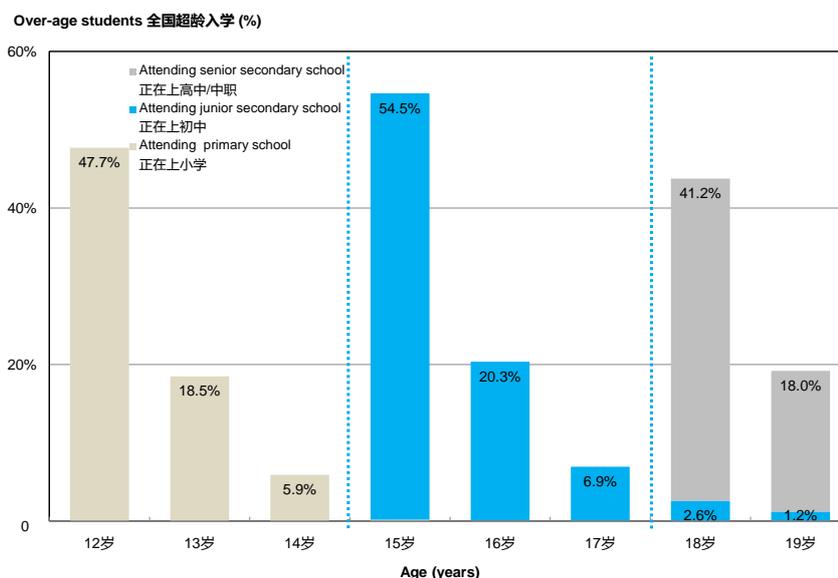
Over-age attendance refers to children and adolescents who are enrolled in an education stage even though their age exceeds the prescribed range for that stage. According to the provisions of the Education Law, China's prescribed age range for primary school is ages 6-11<sup>26</sup>, for junior secondary school is ages 12-14, and for senior secondary school is ages 15-17. The revised Education Law of 2006 reaffirmed the importance of age-appropriate school enrollment and defined the relevant obligations of the legal guardian<sup>27</sup>. Studies have showed that over-age students face more challenges, for example they are more likely to drop out of school. Therefore, in addition to ensuring children and adolescents have access to education, efforts should be undertaken to ensure they are accessing age-appropriate education. Although over-age attendance for children and adolescents has improved overall between 2000 and 2015, the problem is still commonplace in rural areas.

<sup>25</sup> The gender parity index is defined as the ratio of female to male values of a given indicator. Here the gender parity index is used to compare the gender difference in terms of total net attendance rate. Gender Parity Index equal to 1 indicates parity between females and males. In general, a value less than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of boys and a value greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of girls (UNESCO).

<sup>26</sup> The Education Law stipulates that "children who are at least six years of age, regardless of gender, ethnicity and race, shall be enrolled in compulsory education for a specified period of time, and in areas where conditions are inadequate, children can postpone primary school enrollment to age 7."

<sup>27</sup> Article 58 of the revised Education Law promulgated in 2006 stipulates that "parents or legal guardians of school-age children and adolescents, who have not provided opportunities to access compulsory education in accordance with the provisions, will be warned by the local township government or the county education department and ordered to make corrections within a specified time".

**Figure 22:**  
Proportion of over-age students aged 12-19, 2015



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Assuming children enroll in primary school at age 6, in 2015, there were still 47.7% of students aged 12 attending primary school, and 54.5% of students aged 15 attending junior secondary school. Of the students aged 18 in school, 41.2% were attending high school or vocational school, and another 2.6% were still attending junior secondary school (Figure 22). However, assuming children enroll in primary school at age 6 may overestimate the proportion of over-age attendance for two reasons. First, there are a small number of areas in China that allow children to enroll in primary school at age 7. Based on the 2015 data, although 18.4% of children aged 6 were not yet enrolled in school, the percentage of children aged 7 enrolled in school was 96.7%, indicating the majority of children were enrolled by this age. It should be noted that there are no gender or urban/rural differences amongst children who were not yet enrolled in school at age 6. Second, the reference time of the Census and the 1% National Population Sample Survey is November 1, while the annual school year starts on September 1. Due to the difference of two months, children born in September and October would have aged by one year, and may have been counted as over-age students<sup>28</sup>.

In simpler terms, it may be more practical to assume that children enroll in primary school at age 7 to analyze the proportion of over-age students. In this scenario, there were 18.5% of students aged 13 attending primary school, 20.3% of student aged 16 attending junior secondary school, and 18% of students aged 19 attending senior secondary school. An even smaller proportion of students aged 18-19 were attending junior secondary school. Over-age students did not show gender differences, but the urban-rural differences were obvious: 23% of students aged 13 in rural areas were attending primary school, 31% of students aged 16 were attending junior secondary school, and 23% of students aged 19 were attending senior secondary school. Only 4% of students aged 18 and 2% of students aged 19 in rural areas were still attending junior secondary school.

**Figure 23: Over-age attendance, assuming children enroll in primary school at age 7, 2015 (%)**

	National	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Han	Ethnic minorities	Rural poverty-stricken areas
7-12 year-olds not in school	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.8	1.1	0.7	1.9	1.3
13-15 year-olds in primary school	8.2	8.2	8.1	6.1	10.0	7.7	12.5	11.8
16-18 year-olds in junior high school or below	9.8	9.9	9.6	4.5	15.4	9.3	13.4	18.6

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Over-age attendance is also more common among ethnic minority children and children from poverty-stricken areas. Assuming children enroll in primary school at age 7 and looking at the over-age students in junior secondary school for example, the proportion of ethnic minority students aged 16-18 years was 13.4%, four percentage points higher than Han students. The proportion of students aged 16-18 years from poverty-stricken areas was 18.6%, three percentage points higher than the national rural average.

### 6.5 Completion of Compulsory and Senior Secondary Education

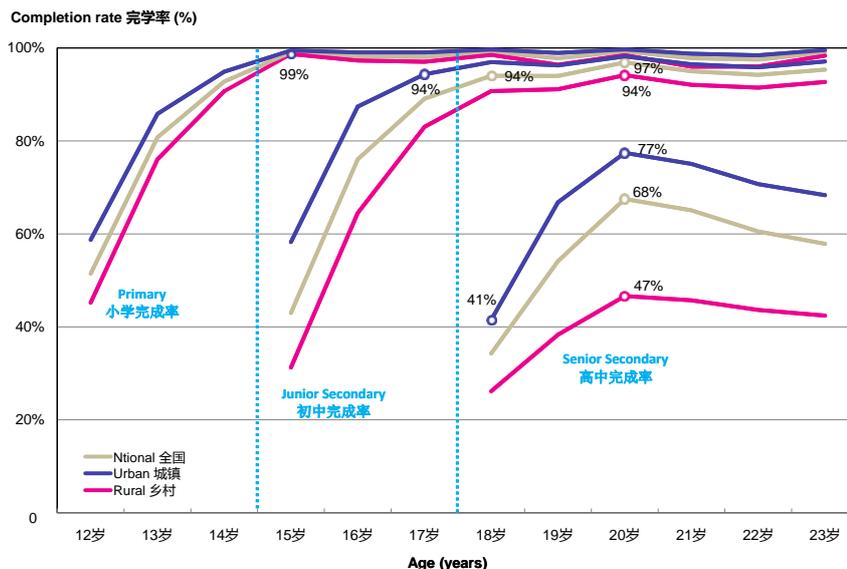
In 2015, the primary school completion rate<sup>29</sup> at age 15 was basically stable at 99%. The junior secondary school completion rate at age 18 reached 94%, and at aged 20 reached a peak of 97%. This is consistent with the fact that some students aged

<sup>28</sup> As per 2010 Census, children born in September and October account for 12.6% of all children born throughout a year. The influence of the two-month difference could be deducted accordingly using this percentage. In addition, normal enrollment at the age 7 in some areas could also be factored in for further adjustment of the proportion of over-age students. Population censuses and surveys only asked questions on the level of education without the grade they attended, thus not enable a more detailed examination by grade.

<sup>29</sup> The rate is calculated for young people aged 3-5 years above the official ending age for a given level of education.

18-19 are still attending junior secondary school. The senior secondary school completion rate at age 20 reached a peak of 67.5%.

**Figure 24: Primary and secondary education completion rate, by urban-rural residence, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

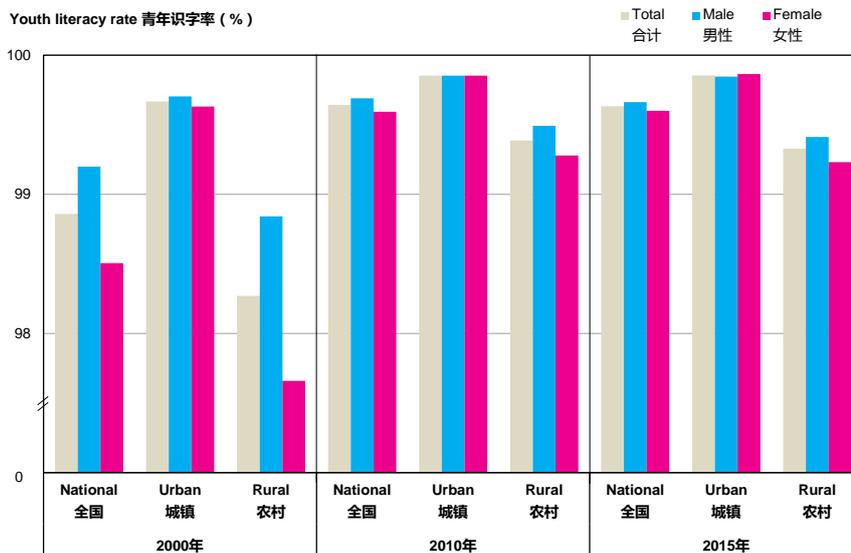
There was no significant urban-rural difference in the primary school completion rate, but the average age of rural children to complete the same level of education was higher than that of urban children. Junior secondary school completion rate of rural areas was slightly lower than urban areas, and the issue of over-age attendance was more apparent. Majority of students in rural areas completed junior secondary school at age 20 (94%), while students in urban areas generally completed junior secondary school by age 17. In addition to the fact that children in rural areas completed senior secondary school at older ages, there was also differences in the completion rate. The senior secondary school completion rate at age 20 was 47%, 30 percentage points lower than that of urban areas, and only slightly higher than the completion rate at age 17 in urban areas.

Primary and junior secondary school completion rates did not show significant gender differences, but the gender differences in senior secondary school completion rates were noticeable. The senior secondary school completion rate among girls aged 18 was 37%, five percentage points higher than boys; among girls aged 20 was 71%, six percentage points higher than boys. The gender advantages demonstrated among girls was almost all concentrated in urban areas, as rural girls did not significantly perform better than boys. The senior secondary school completion rate among girls at age 18 and age 20 in urban areas were 46% and 81%, respectively, which is seven and nine percentage points higher than boys respectively.

### 6.6 Youth literacy rate

With the universalization of compulsory education, the literary rate of China's youth aged 15-24 years have been high between 2010 and 2015, remaining unchanged at 99.6%, and an increase from 2000. There were slight differences between urban and rural areas and based on gender in 2015, but the difference is not as apparent as 2000. Basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills are very important for personal development. It is particularly critical to develop human capital of youth aged 15-24 who are about to or just enter adulthood, as it can predict future social and economic development of a country.

**Figure 25: Youth literacy rate for population aged 15-24, 2000, 2010 and 2015**



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population

## 7. Adolescent marriage and birth

In 2015, there were 75.11 million people in the 15-19 age group, of which 1.20 million were married. The marriage rate among the 15-19 age group was 1.6%. Significant differences in gender, age, ethnicity, and geographic regions were found among adolescents who were married:

- The proportion of adolescent females married was higher than adolescent males. The marriage rate of girls aged 15-19 was 2.4%, corresponding to about 830,000 adolescent girls. The marriage rate of boys of the same age group was less than 1%, corresponding to about 370,000 adolescent boys.
- The majority of the married adolescents were aged 18-19 years, accounting for three-quarters of the married population aged 15-19 years;
- The adolescent marriage rate in rural areas (2.4%) was higher than that of urban areas (less than 1%). One in 10 adolescent girls aged 19 years in rural areas were married, with a marriage rate of 9.8%;
- The marriage rate was higher among adolescents residing in poverty-stricken areas and ethnic minority adolescents. Among these two groups, the marriage rate of adolescent girls aged 19 years was 11% and 15%, respectively.

Between 2000 and 2015, the adolescent marriage rate in China has remained at a low level, but with a slightly increasing trend over time. In 2000, the national marriage rate among the 15-19 age group was 0.8%, which increased to 1.3% in 2010, and further climbed to 1.6% in 2015. In terms of age, the increase in the marriage rate among adolescents aged 15-17 years was evident, which requires further attention and investigation regarding the reasons behind this trend.

Consistent with the rising trend of marriage rates, the fertility rate of adolescent girls aged 15-19 years between 2000 and 2015 was also slightly higher: in 2000, 6‰ of adolescent girls aged 15-19 years had a child, and this increased to 9‰ in 2015. Similar to the marriage rate, the fertility rate also showed significant differences in age and by region. Majority of the adolescent girls who had a child were around age 18-19, and the fertility rate of rural adolescent girls aged 19 years reached 37‰. Overall, China is still one of the countries with the lowest fertility rates among adolescents, with adolescent fertility only accounting for 3% of the overall women's fertility.

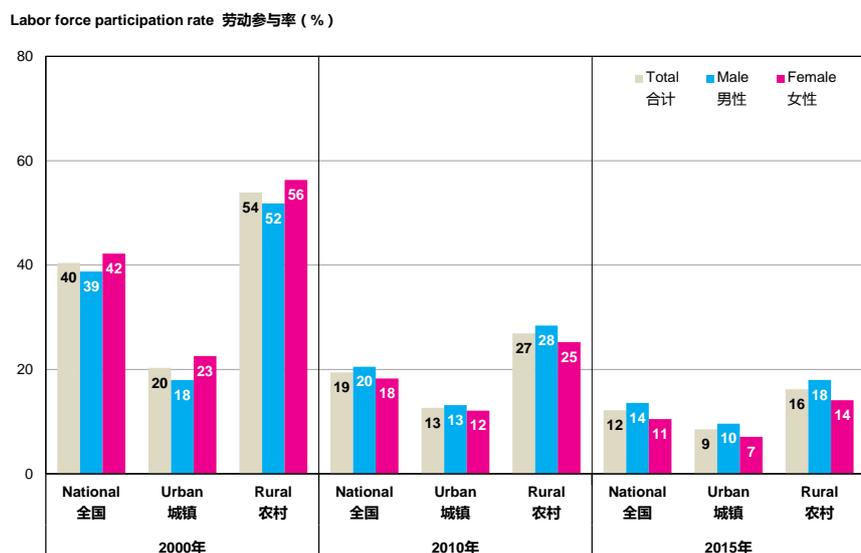
## 8. Employment status of children aged 16-17

The legal age of entry into employment in China is 16 years of age. According to the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey, there were 30.32 million children aged 16-17 in China, of which 3.70 million or 12.2% were employed. The labor force participation rate steadily decreased since 2010. It dropped by seven percentage points compared with that of 2010, and dropped by 28 percentage points when compared with that of 2000.

The decline of the labor force participation rate among children aged 16-17 is closely related to the vigorous development of senior secondary school and higher education since the turn of the century. Taking senior secondary school children aged 17 as an example, the school attendance rate increased from 38% in 2000 to 78.8% in 2015, correspondingly reducing the possibility to participate in the labor force.

In rural areas, children entered the labor market earlier on. Thus, the labor force participation rate of children aged 16-17 in rural areas was significantly higher, about two times than that of urban areas since 2000. In terms of gender difference, the male and female differences in labor force participation rates among children aged 16-17 years were reversed during 2000-2010. In 2000, the labor force participation rates of urban and rural girls were higher than that of boys. Yet in the period between 2010 and 2015, the female labor force participation rate was lower than that of male, which is in line with the higher school attendance rate of women in this age group (Figure 26).

**Figure 26 : Labor force participation rate of children aged 16-17, 2000, 2010 and 2015**



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population

## 9. About UNICEF and UNFPA

### UNICEF

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is on the ground in over 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. UNICEF first assisted China between 1947 and 1951, providing emergency services, food and nutrition, health and hygiene training. In 1979 UNICEF officially commenced its cooperation with the Government of China.

Since then, UNICEF has worked in cooperation with the Government of China to support the survival, protection and development of children in China. The 2016-2020 UNICEF-Government of China Programme of Cooperation focuses on promoting the health and nutrition of children and women; increasing their access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene; improving access to and delivery of quality early learning, basic education and non-formal education; improving access to family and community-based child protection services, accompanied by supportive policies; and promoting social policy and reform for children.

UNICEF's work is guided by both international treaties such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*; as well as China's own national strategies and priorities for children.

Aligned to the organization's equity focus, much of UNICEF China's work takes place in rural parts of western and central China, where economic and social development indicators lag behind. By documenting, analyzing and scaling up experiences gained from innovative models and approaches that demonstrate high impact results for the most disadvantaged, the UNICEF-Government of China Programme of Cooperation aims to influence national policies, programmes and budgets for the benefit of vulnerable children throughout the country.

For more information about UNICEF in China, please visit <http://www.unicef.cn>.

### UNFPA

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is an international development agency that aims to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

UNFPA's key areas of work are:

- Population and development: UNFPA assists governments in collecting, processing and analyzing population data and trends, supporting governments in using the resulting information in the formulation of national and sectoral development policy plans and strategies in order to appropriately meet people's current and future needs.
- Reproductive health: UNFPA supports the government's efforts to increase access to and utilization of: quality maternal and newborn health services; quality, voluntary and informed choices of family planning services for individuals and couples; HIV and STI prevention services, especially for young people and other key populations at risk; and midwifery education.
- Gender equality: UNFPA advocates for the advancement gender equality and reproductive rights and the elimination of gender based violence, and supports the formulation and implementation of laws and policies in this field.
- Youth: UNFPA aims to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services and sexuality education for young people (including adolescents).

For more information about UNFPA in China, please visit <http://www.unfpa.org>.

Data is the foundation for good policy making. In China, UNICEF and UNFPA have been working with the National Bureau of Statistics and other partners to increase availability, analysis and use of data disaggregated by sex, age and region, from both regular population census/surveys and administrative reporting systems. The aim is to enhance monitoring and reporting by the national statistical systems on national development plans such as the National Programmes of Action for Women and Children, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Annex

Annex 1: Child population by age, by urban-rural residence and sex, 2015

Annex 2: Population by broad age group, by urban-rural residence and sex, 2000, 2010 and 2015

Annex 3: Child population by province, by urban-rural residence and sex, 2015

Annex 4: Children affected by migration, by urban-rural residence, age and sex, 2015

Annex 5: Education participation and completion of children and adolescents, by urban-rural residence, age and sex, 2015

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