

# The Youth Population in China (2018): the Current Situation and Development Trends





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Youth is considered a transitional period of development. The youth population refers to a special group of people whose age spans from puberty to early adulthood. As their physiological and psychological development mature, their cognitive and social adaptation abilities also experience rapid development. Consequently, they gradually start to cope with various physiological, psychological and social changes independently. After experiencing this developmental stage, most of the youth population are able to successfully proceed to the middle and late stages of adulthood. However, a small number of youths may find themselves in a disadvantaged position when faced with various risks and find it difficult to obtain further development opportunities.

The health and development of Chinese youths are closely related to the future of the nation, and the notion that “investing in the youth population is investing in the future” has become the general consensus. This report will present descriptive analysis on the situation of the youth population in China, mainly based on data from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey and previous population censuses and surveys, and focusing on the current characteristics of the Chinese youth population as well as the relevant changing trends.

## Definition

**Youth:** There are three commonly used terms describing the development of adolescents and youths: adolescents, youths and young people. According to WHO<sup>1</sup>, adolescents refer to persons aged 10-19, youths refer to those aged 15-24, and young people refer to those aged 10-24. This report focuses on youths, namely those aged 15-24.

**The educational development stages of youths by age:** The educational development process of youths is categorized into three stages by age: secondary education (mainly senior secondary education, ages

15-17), undergraduate education (ages 18-21) and graduate education (ages 22-24).

**Migrant youth:** Migrant youths are those aged 15-24 in the migrant population. Migrants are defined as those whose current residence is not in the village or township of their registered household residence, and who have been away from their registered household residence for more than half a year. It excludes those who reside in a different district of the same city as their registered household residence.

## Data Sources

Unless otherwise stated, the main data source of this report is the 1% National Population Sample Survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2015, supplemented by historical data of previous population censuses. China has conducted six national population censuses in 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010,

and the current frequency is every ten years. The 1% National Population Sample Survey is conducted in between two population censuses, and it is known as the “mini-census”. The two most recent mini censuses were conducted in 2005 and 2015.

1. WHO. Adolescent health and development. ([http://www.searo.who.int/entity/child\\_adolescent/topics/adolescent\\_health/en/](http://www.searo.who.int/entity/child_adolescent/topics/adolescent_health/en/)).

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## 1. An Overview of the Youth Population

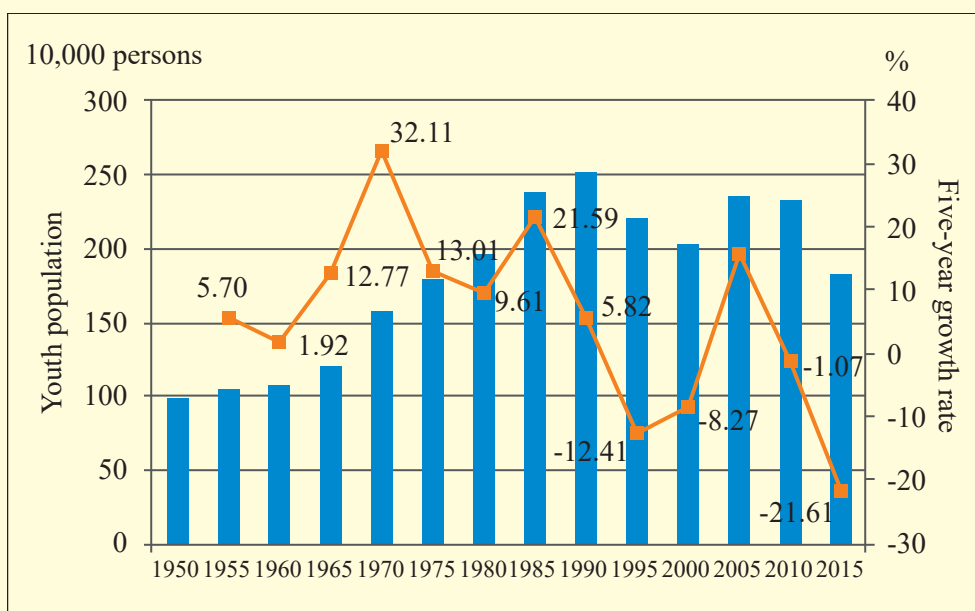
### 1.1 Size of the youth population and its development trajectory (1982-2015)

Since 1950, the total youth population in China has presented a trend of fluctuated development. Specifically, it experienced a period of growth from 1950 to 1990, then a period of decline from 1990 to 2000, followed by another period of growth from 2000 to 2005, and most recently another period of decline from 2005 to 2015 (Figure 1-1).

Correspondingly, the proportion of China's youth population to the total youth population in the world and in Asia have experienced a gradual decline since 1990, and it has demonstrated a greater decline if compared with the proportion of China's total

population to the total population of the world and Asia. In 2015, the world's total population was 7.383 billion, in which China accounted for 18.92%, down by 0.8 and 1.96 percentage points compared with the figures in 2010 and 2000, respectively. In the same year, China accounted for 31.61% of the total population in Asia, down by 1 and 2.79 percentage points from the figures in 2010 and 2000, respectively. The proportion of China's youth population to the total youth population in the world and in Asia has dropped by 5-7 percentage points since 1990. Since 2000, the size of the youth population in the world demonstrated a trend of increase at the beginning (2000-2010) followed by a trend of decrease (2010-2015). In 2010, the world's total youth population was 1.222 billion, an increase of some 133 million from 2000. By 2015, the world's

Figure 1-1 Size of the youth population in China (1950-2015)



Source: World Population Prospects, 2016.

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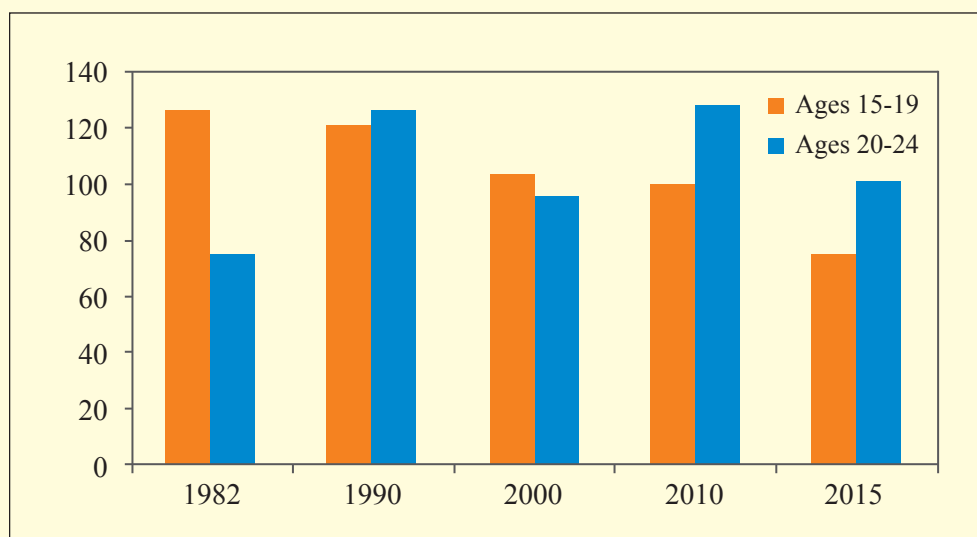
total youth population was 1.195 billion, a decrease of approximately 27 million from 2010. The same trend of increase at the beginning (2000-2005) followed by a trend of decrease (2005-2015) also applied to the proportion of China's youth population in the world and in Asia. In 2015, the proportion of Chinese youths in the world was 15.25%, a decrease of 2.3, 4.51 and 3.35 percentage points from 2010, 2005 and 2000, respectively. Similarly, in 2015, the proportion of Chinese youths in Asia was 25.39%, a decrease of 5.27, 6.25 and 4.70<sup>2</sup> percentage points compared with that in 2010, 2005 and 2000, respectively.

According to the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey, there were 175 million youths aged 15-24 in China at the end of 2015, accounting for 12.76% of the total population. Examining historical data on the

changes to the youth subgroups, the absolute number of the youths aged 15-19 gradually decreased from 130 million in 1982 to 75.11 million in 2015. In the same period, the youth population aged 20-24 recorded a fluctuated development: it rose from around 70 million in 1982 to 130 million in 1990, declined to 100 million in 2000, increased to 130 million in 2010, and fell again to around 100 million in 2015 (Figure 1-2).

At the same time, the proportion of youths in the total population presented a similar trend to the change in population size. From 1982 to 2015, the proportion of youths aged 15-19 decreased from 12.5% to 5.5% in the total population. The proportion of youths aged 20-24 reached its peak value of 11.1% in 1990, and stood around 7.5% in 1982, 2000 and 2015. Excluding influencing factors such as death, this reflects the birth

**Figure 1-2 Size of the youth population (1982-2015, Million)**



Data Source: Calculated according to the historical national population censuses and 1% national population sample survey data.

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



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levels of three key cohorts in China: the early 1960s (during the Three Years of Great Famine), the period from 1980 to 1985, and the period between 1995 and 2000 (Figure 1-2).

## 1.2 Sex ratio of the youth population rose rapidly in the recent five years

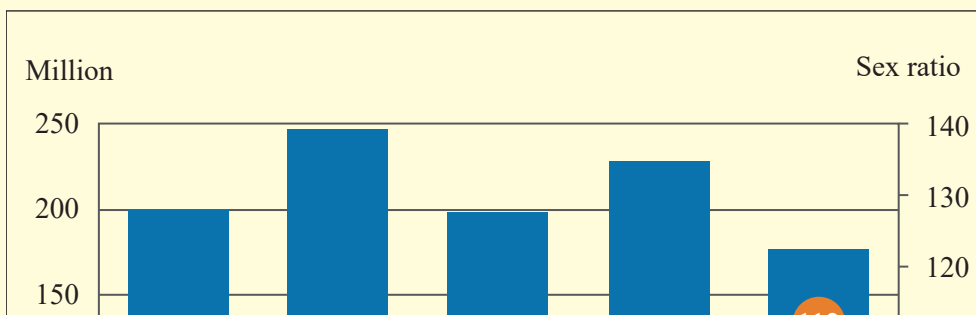
From 1982 to 2010, sex ratio of the youth population maintained at around 104-105, but by 2015, it rose rapidly to 112 (Figure 1-3).

The rapid increase in the sex ratio of the youth population between 2010 and 2015 was the delayed effect of the increase in sex ratio at birth of those born during the 1990s. According to relevant population censuses and the 1% population sample surveys, sex ratio at birth in China was 108.5 in 1981, it rose to 110.3 in 1990, and reached as high as 115.6 and 118.6 in 1995 and 2000,

respectively. The Sixth National Population Census in 2010 showed a sex ratio at birth of 118.1, which was still very high despite the decline compared with the 2000 census figure. Estimates based on this trend indicate that the sex ratio of the youth population will remain at a relatively high level between 2025 and 2030.

In 2015, there were 175 million youths in China, including 92.61 million males and 82.90 million females, with a sex ratio of 112. Specifically, the youths aged 15-19 accounted for 43%, including 40.40 million males and 34.79 million females, with a sex ratio of 116; and the youths aged 20-24 accounted for the other 57%, including 52.20 million males and 48.11 million females, with a sex ratio of 109 (this figure excludes active military personnel of the People's Liberation Army). It is evident that the sex ratio of the youth population was high overall, and youths aged 15-19 had a higher sex ratio than those aged 20-24 (Figure 1-4).

Figure 1-3 Sex ratio of the youth population in China (1982-2015)



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