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Children are the foundation of our society and culture, and the healthy development of children is the basis for positive human and social development. In recent years, great improvements have been made in the survival and development of China's children, but great internal disparities remain. Factors such as unbalanced regional development, rapid socioeconomic transformation, and mass internal migration have resulted in survival and development challenges for many children, and the overall situation of child development in China should be further promoted and improved. This publication describes and analyzes the status of China's child population, based on data from the 2010 Census and previous Censuses. The Census is a rich source of basic data and information on the child population and its characteristics by sub-groups, and analysis of Census data can support enhanced understanding of and more evidence-based decision making on issues affecting children.

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.

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 676 counties that form the 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 828 distinct counties categorized as "poverty-stricken areas."

Sex ratio: Sex ratio refers to the ratio of males to females in the population, and is an important indicator of sex composition. It is usually expressed as the number of males corresponding to every 100 females.

Sex ratio at birth: 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.

Failure to receive or complete compulsory education: 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.

Data Sources:

The data in this publication mainly come from the Sixth Population Census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2010, as well as from previous censuses and inter-census surveys. China conducts a national census once every ten years, with six censuses conducted to date, in 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010. China conducts an inter-census population survey every 10 years in years ending in "5", with a sampling fraction of 1% (called One Percent Population Sample Survey). The most recent inter-census survey was conducted in 2005.

China's population census is characterized by some under-reporting of young children. In this publication, with the exception of infant mortality rate, which have been adjusted for underreporting, all other figures are sourced from data directly reported from the census. The internationally comparable estimates included in this publication come from *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision* issued by the UNDESA/Population Division, with some differences from China's census data.

This publication has been developed on the basis of research projects on the Sixth National Census conducted by Professor Chen Wei (Renmin University), Professor Duan Chengrong (Renmin University) and Researcher Wang Guangzhou (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). These three research projects received the technical and financial support of the NBS/UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Data Project.
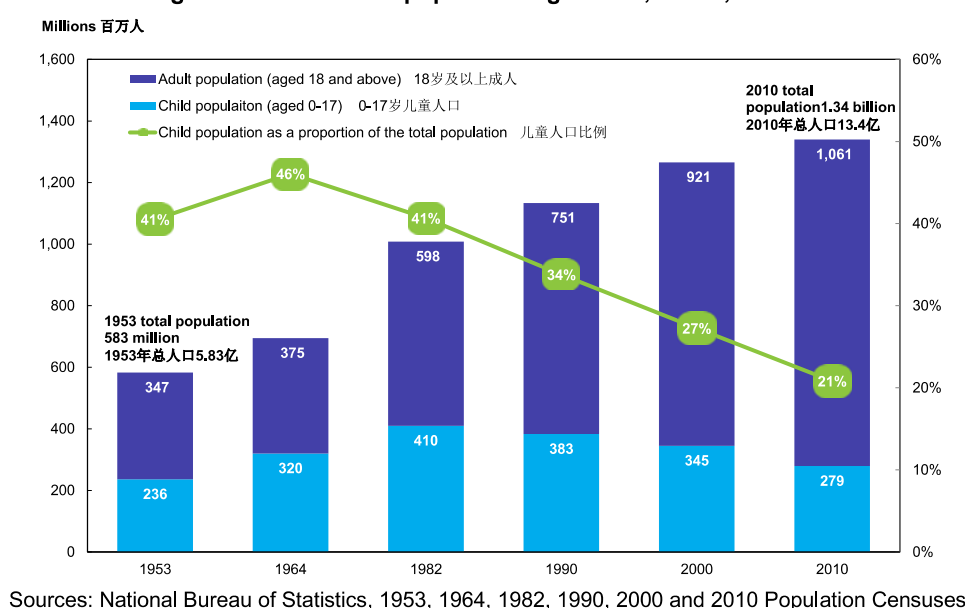
China

According to data from the Sixth National Census, the child population aged 0-17 in China was 279 million in 2010, accounting for 21% of the total national population. With rapid economic development and demographic transition, especially with sustained low birth rates since the implementation of the family planning policy in late 1970s, the size of China's child population has continually declined since the 1980s, and has declined even more significantly in the past 10 years (Figure 1).

Over the past 60 years in China, total population has grown much faster than the child population, leading to an increasingly aged population. Population pyramids plotted by age and sex on the basis of census data clearly show the changes in the population structure and the ageing trend over the past 60 years (Appendix 1).

Figure 1: Size of child population aged 0-17, China, 1953-2010

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses

The world

According to the internationally comparable estimates reported in the UN's W*orld Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, both global total population and global child population aged 0-17 have grown rapidly over the past 60 years. The total population of the world has nearly trebled, increasing from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6.9 billion in 2010. The child population more than doubled from 1 billion in 1950 to 2.2 billion in 2010. 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.

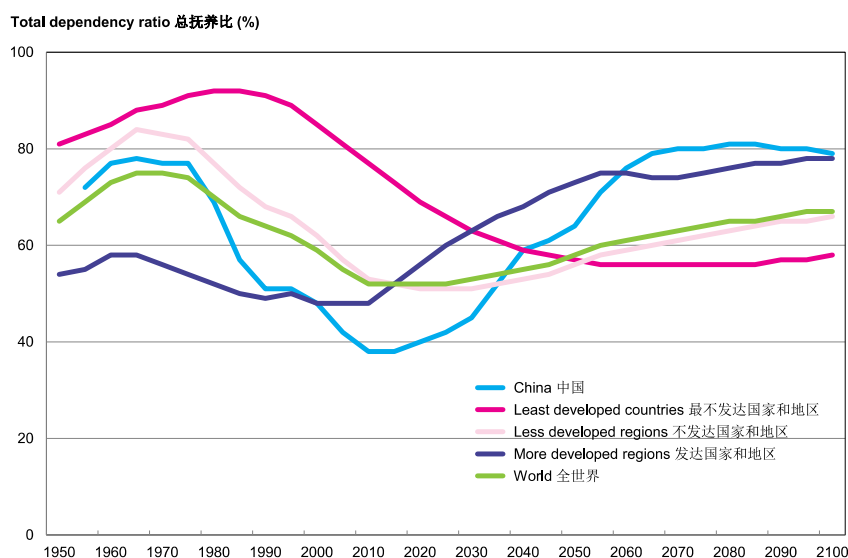**Figure 2: China and India's share of the world's child population, 1950-2010**
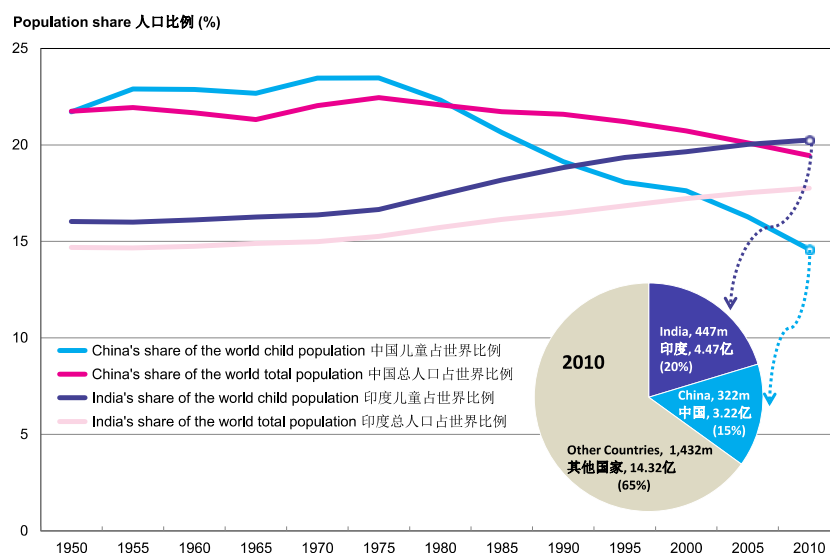
Source: UNDESA/Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, extended CD-Rom

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In 2010, China remained the world's most populous country, accounting for 20% of the total population of the world, but China's child population ranked second in the world, only accounting for 15% of the global child population. China's child population as a proportion of global child population began to drop progressively after 1980. In 2010, China's total population was 117 million more than that of India, but its child population was 125 million less than that of India. 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 (Figure 2).

According to the UN's *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, the child dependency ratio in China (ratio of the population aged 0-14 to the population aged 15-64) dropped by half between 1950 and 2010. 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 or above to the population aged 15-64) kept rising. With the further transformation and accelerated ageing of the population structure, the total dependency ratio in China is estimated to reach 80% in the next 60 years (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Total dependency ratio in China and the world, actual and projected, 1950-2100

Source: UNDESA/Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, extended CD-Rom

II. Composition of child population – including children affected by migration, children in poverty-stricken areas and children without registered residence

Composition of total child population

By sex: There were 150 million males, accounting for 54%, and 129 million females, accounting for 46% of the child population in 2010. The overall sex ratio of the child population was 116 males for every 100 females, with 21 million more male children than female children.

By ethnicity: There were 248 million children of the Han ethnic group, accounting for 89%, and 31 million children of ethnic minority groups, accounting for 11% of the child population.

By age: There were 90.26 million children in the preschool stage (0-5 years), 131 million children in the compulsory education stage (6-14 years) and 57.59 million children in the senior secondary stage (15-17 years) in 2010. The changes in the size of the child population at different developmental stages have great implications for educational infrastructure, human resources and planning.

By urban-rural residence: There were 125 million children in urban areas, accounting for 45%, and 154 million children in rural areas, accounting for 55% of the child population. The proportion of the child population that is urban was significantly lower than the national rate of 50% for the total population. This gap reflects differences in birth levels in urban and rural areas, as well as the large number of left-behind children in rural areas as a result of migrating parents.

Figure 4: Composition of child population in China, 2010

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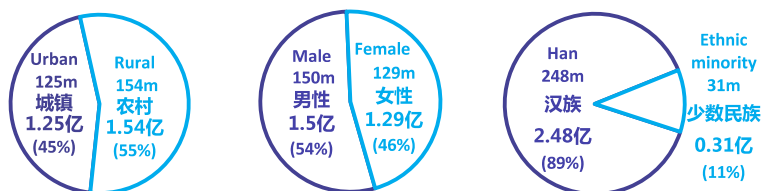
Age 年龄	0 1 2	3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10 11	12 13 14	15 16 17	
Level of education 教育阶段	0-2 years 幼儿	Pre-primary 学前教育	Primary 小学	Junior Secondary 初中	Senior Secondary 高中	Total 0-17岁 合计
Number of children (millions) 儿童人数（百万人）	45.06	45.20	84.54	46.52	57.59	278.91
Number of migrant children (millions) 流动儿童人数（百万人）	3.86	5.12	9.29	4.64	12.90	35.81
Number of rural left-behind children (millions) 农村留守儿童人数（百万人）	11.72	11.70	19.53	9.95	8.13	61.03

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Census

Children affected by migration[1] – over 100 million children nationwide were affected by migration

In 2010, the number of migrant children aged 0-17 was 35.81 million, and the number of left-behind children aged 0-17 was 69.73 million. Adding these two groups together, the total number of children affected by migration exceeded 100 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. The number of migrant children and left-behind children increased significantly compared to 2000 and 2005 (Figure 5), while the number of migrant children increased more rapidly during the period of 2005-2010 and the number of left-behind children tended to become stable.

The vast majority of children affected by migration came from or lived in rural areas. Of the 35.81 million migrant children, 80.4% of them were registered with "agricultural" residences (i.e. with agricultural *hukou*). Thus, it is estimated that there were some 28.77 million migrant children living away from their rural place of registration. Of all the left-behind children nationwide, 61.03 million of them were in rural areas[2], accounting for 87.5% of all left-behind children and 40% of all rural children.

Nationally, the proportion of migrant children among urban children was 26.3% on average, which means that 1 out of every 4 children in urban areas was a migrant child.

The Census found that, somewhat contrary to popular conception, most of the migrant children had lived and studied in the places to which they had migrated for a long time, with duration of migration averaging 3.7 years. Of the migrant children aged 7-14, one third had a migration time (i.e. had lived in the receiving area) exceeding 6 years.

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.

It should be noted that many migrant children of schooling age are confronted with challenges to quality education. Compared to a few years ago, the number of preschool-aged migrant children has increased greatly, but it is difficult for migrant children to enroll in kindergartens in big cities. Meanwhile, some 2.9% of migrant children of compulsory education age failed to receive compulsory education as required. The "Two Priorities"[3] policy needs to be further implemented. The number of inter-provincial migrant children who face the problem of sitting university entrance examinations in places other than their registered residence reached about 300,000 annually, with 27.8% of these children in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.[4] In 2010, some 36% of migrant children were between 15-17 years of age. Most of them attended school, but quite a few of them abandoned senior secondary education to become new-generation migrant workers and face the challenges of the migrant population, including the issue of social exclusion. All of these challenges need to be met with positive and appropriate solutions.

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[1] For more information about children affected by migration, refer to *Part IV. Family structure and child-rearing*, and *Part VI: Status of child education* of this publication.

[2] Compared to urban left-behind children, rural left-behind children face more serious problems. Rural children are almost left behind because their parents have migrated for work. In contrast, urban children are left behind for more diversified reasons, such as parents' job transfer, geographic distribution of urban education resources and other factors. 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 focuses on.

[3] In recent years, with the growing number of migrant workers, the issue of education for their children has become prominent. The revised *Compulsory Education Law* of 2006 makes special provisions to ensure that children of migrant workers receive equal access to nine-year basic education. The *National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)* requires "the governments of the receiving cities to bear the major responsibilities of providing basic education for migrant children, primarily by accommodating them in public schools" ("Two Priorities").

[4] The number of inter-provincial migrant children who face the problem of sitting university entrance examinations in places other than their registered residence is estimated based on multiple sources other than Population Census data.

Figure 5: Number and composition of migrant and left-behind children, 2000, 2005 and 2010
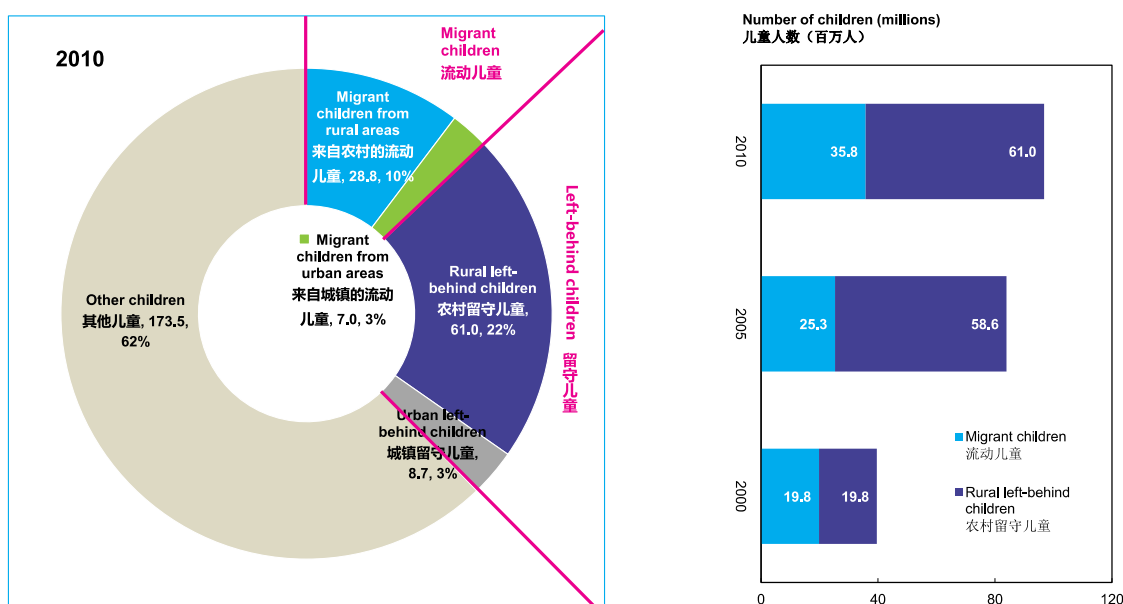
Note : In the doughnut chart the first number refers to the child population in millions; the second refers to its share of the total child population.

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2005 One Percent Population Sample Survey

In 2010, there were seven major provinces to which a total of 16.4 million migrant children had migrated (more than 1.5 million to each province), namely Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Sichuan, Shandong, Henan and Fujian. The number of migrant children in these provinces accounted for about half of all migrant children nationwide (46%). The places with the highest proportions of migrant children among the total local child population included Zhejiang, Shanghai and Beijing, which have high levels of urbanization and economic development; as well as some central and western provinces and regions such as Ningxia, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai and Guizhou. In terms of distance and place of migration, 70% of migrant children migrated within their provinces of origin.

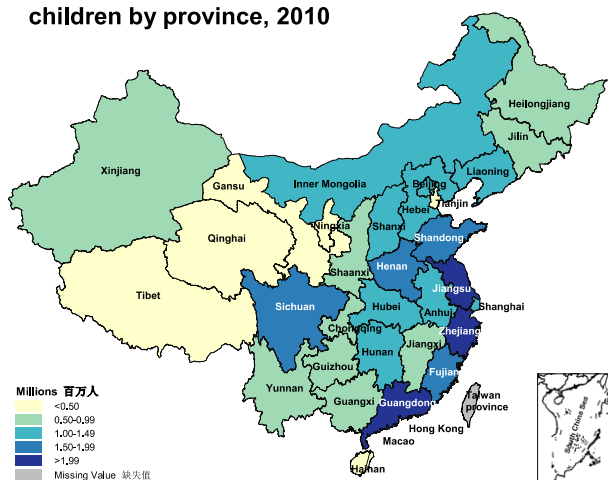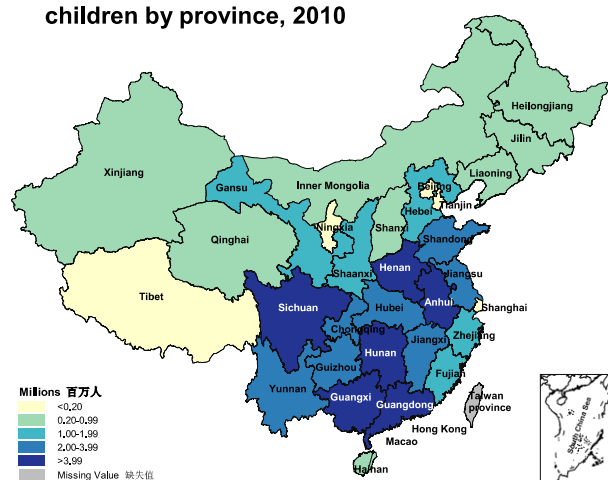## Figure 6a: Number of migrant children by province, 2010

Figure 6b: Number of rural left-behind children by province, 2010

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Census

Half of the rural left-behind children were located in six major labor-exporting provinces: Sichuan, Henan, Anhui, Guangdong, Hunan and Guangxi. The number of left-behind children in each of these six provinces was more than 4 million, accounting for more than 40% of the rural child population in each province. Other provinces with highly visible rural left-behind child populations are major labor-exporting areas such as Chongqing (66.5%), Jiangsu (51.6%) and Jiangxi (51.5%), where left-behind children accounted for more than half of the total rural child population in these provinces.

Children in poverty-stricken areas – 25% of children nationwide lived in poverty-stricken areas

In 2010, the number of children living in poverty-stricken areas (828 counties in total, including "key poverty counties" and counties in "poverty blocks") was 70 million, accounting for about 25% of the child population nationwide. Of the children in poverty-stricken areas, a relatively low 26% lived in urban areas, compared to the national urbanization rate for children of 45%.

Child poverty is multi-dimensional. According to the 2010 census, children in poverty-stricken areas lagged behind other children in terms of health level, enrolment in or completion of compulsory education, and household water and sanitation conditions. In poverty-stricken areas, the mortality of children at each age was higher than the national average by 50% or more. In about half of the age groups, this figure was higher than the national average by 80% or more. About 5% of children in poverty-stricken areas failed to receive or complete compulsory education, which was higher than the national average by about 2 percentage points. In poverty-stricken areas, only 64% of children lived with both parents, which was lower than the national average by 6 percentage points. For children in poverty-stricken areas, household latrine coverage was 55% (compared to a national average of 71%) and piped water coverage rate was 40% (compared to a national average of 61%). In addition, the poverty-stricken counties had a higher proportion of left-behind children, and early marriage and early childbearing among young people aged 15-19 were relatively more prevalent.

Children without a registered residence – Youngest rural children a major concern

2010 Census data finds that some 13.76 million persons in China had no registered residence (also called "undetermined registered residence"), of which some 12.36 million (90%) were children aged 0-17 (Figure 7). The children without a registered residence (*hukou*) were mainly very young children, with children aged 0-5 representing 86% of the total children aged 0-17, of which children aged 0-2 accounting for 66%. Nearly 70% of children without registered residence lived in rural areas, higher than the national proportion of rural children by 15 percentage points.

Children without registered residence included 6.28 million male children and 6.08 million female children. The sex ratio was 103, much less than the overall sex ratio for children aged 0-17 (116 males per 100 females). The sex ratio was 116 for children less than 1, and 112 for children between 1-2 years old, while lower than the corresponding age-specific sex ratio, was still notably high. In contrast, the sex ratio among children without registered residence was under 100 for children aged 3 and above, with the trend being that the older the children, the lower the sex ratio (Figure 7).

Based on the age- and sex-disaggregated data for children, most of the population without a registered residence appeared to be young children born outside of the family planning policy, who were not registered with a *hukou*. Boys accounted for a larger share of children without a *hukou* up until the age of 2 years. Among slightly older children, especially among school-aged children, girls were more likely than boys to have unregistered residence and thus more likely to face challenges in accessing public social services, including school and health care.

Figure 7: Age structure and sex ratio of population without a registered residence (*hukou*), 2010
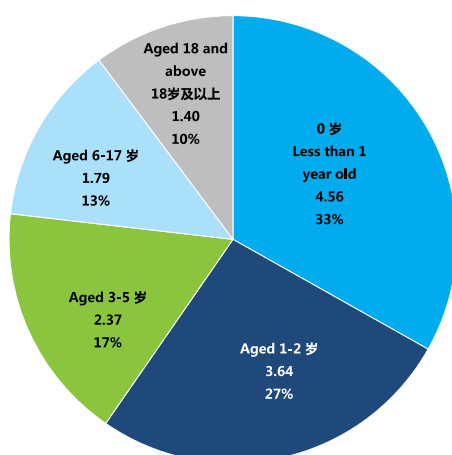
Note : In the pie chart, the first number refers to the age-specific population, in millions, of people without *hukou*; the second refers to its share of the total number of people without *hukou*.
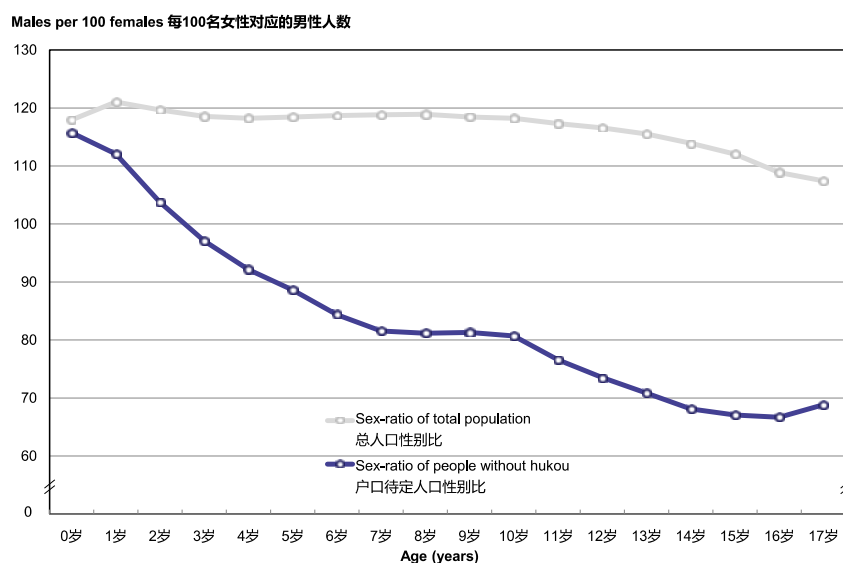
Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Census

Sex ratio of children aged 0-17

The sex ratio of boys to girls in China has continually increased over the past 30 years. From 1982 to 1990, the sex ratio of the child population rose from 106 to 108 males per 100 females, but was still within the global average range. After 1990, however, the sex ratio of the child population rose rapidly, surpassing this range, reaching 116 in 2010. In mainland China's 31 province-level regions, the sex ratio of the child population ranged from 105 to 128. Jiangxi had the highest ratio, while Hainan, Henan, Hubei and Anhui each exceeded 120. Only Tibet's child sex ratio, at 105, fell within the normal range (Appendix 2). Contributing to this acutely high sex ratio of males to females in the overall child population has been the continually rising sex ratio at birth over the past several decades.
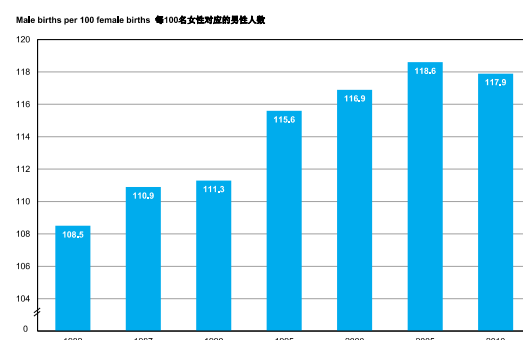
Sex ratio at birth

Census data indicate that China's sex ratio at birth (SRB) began to exceed the global range in the 1980s, and has risen steadily since then, increasing from 109 in 1982 to 118 males born for every 100 females in 2010 (Figure 8a). China is now the country with the most severely imbalanced SRB in the world.

China's high SRB has the following characteristics: (1) SRB was higher in rural than urban areas, but the urban-rural gap has narrowed somewhat in recent years (Figure 8b). (2) SRB rose with birth order (Figure 8c). It should be noted that in the absence of sex selection practices, sex ratio remains constant across birth order. (3) The degree of imbalance in SRB differs across regions. In 2010, except for Xinjiang, Tibet and Beijing, all other provinces had a SRB exceeding 110. In Anhui, Fujian and Hainan, the SRB exceeded 125 (Figure 8d). (4) 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 newborns. In 2010, the sex ratio of newborns was above 125 among women of childbearing age with junior secondary education and below, 119 among those with senior secondary education, and 112 among those with tertiary education. (5) The SRB of ethnic minority groups was lower than that of the Han ethnic majority, but showed a similar trend of continual increase, albeit with a lag time of about ten years. SRB among ethnic minorities remained within the upper limit of the normal range until 1989, since which time it has continually increased, reaching 114 in 2010.
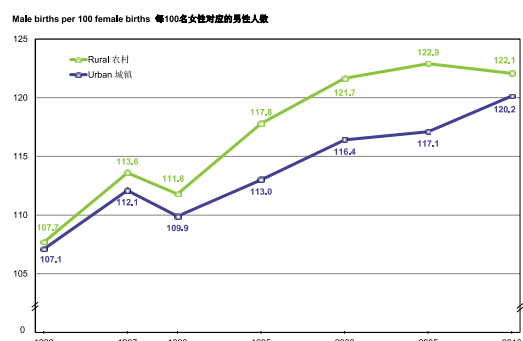
Causes and consequences of high sex ratio at birth
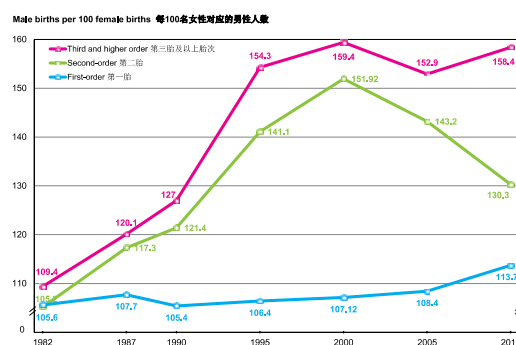
Figure 8: Sex ratio at birth*

(8a) Sex ratio at birth, national, 1982-2010

(8b) Sex ratio at birth, urban and rural, 1982-2010

(8c) Sex ratio at birth by birth order, 1982-2010