



10  
CHILDREN  
AFFECTED BY  
MIGRATION

## OVERVIEW

### Massive internal migration

China's migrant population has increased substantially since 1980s and reached 244 million in 2017. The migrant population has contributed significantly to the overall social and economic development of the country, through driving a gainful urbanization process, increasing rural incomes, restructuring the economy, and reducing urban-rural and regional disparities.

However, the living conditions of migrant population remain inferior to those of the resident population in receiving cities. The planning, financing and delivery of public services by local authorities is based on one's residential *hukou* (household registration) status. The lack of permanent residence status in cities (an urban *hukou*) has become the main constraint for approximately 200 million migrants to access basic public services in education, employment, health care, pension, and affordable housing. The large-scale internal migration has also resulted in other social problems, including the issue of children left-behind in rural areas.<sup>1</sup>

Maximizing the benefits of internal migration, while mitigating its adverse effects, is a difficult balancing act for the Government. Over the years, policy reforms and new legislation have been introduced by the Government to improve migrants' equal access to civil rights, labour rights and rights to basic public services, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth and social development reach the migrants. Within the *National New Urbanization Plan (2014–2020)* and other recent documents, the Government proposes to put people at the core of its urbanization policies, through registering eligible rural workers as permanent urban residents in an orderly manner and progressively expanding the coverage of basic public services for all permanent residents, including migrant populations. However, to address the relevant challenges caused by the massive internal migration and the complex problems created, a gradual long-term process is expected.

### Children affected by migration<sup>2</sup>

Children affected by migration include both migrant children<sup>3</sup> and children left-behind.<sup>4</sup> In 2015, the number of migrant children aged 0–17 was 34.26 million, and the number of children left behind by migrating parents was 68.77 million (of whom 40.51 million were rural children left-behind<sup>5</sup>). Adding these two groups together, the total number of children affected by migration was 103 million, accounting for 38 per cent of the total child population in China. That is, about four out of every 10 children in China were directly affected by migration.

The Government has attached importance to addressing the challenges faced by children affected by migration and has taken active measures. In the late 1990s, the

Government began focusing on migrant children, and declared that the receiving municipal governments bore the main responsibility for providing compulsory education for migrant children through public primary and secondary school enrolment. In recent years, as migration challenges have grown in scale and prominence, the Government has increased its attention on issues related to migrant children and children left-behind and released a series of new policies related to education, health and social protection. The *National Programme of Action for Children (2011–2020)* facilitates cross-sectoral government policies and sets out development objectives specifically related to migrant children and children left-behind, including reducing infant and under-five mortality rates among migrant children, guaranteeing equal access to compulsory education by migrant children, and meeting the basic public service needs of migrant children and children left-behind.

In February 2016, the State Council issued the *Opinions on Strengthening Care and Protection of Rural Children Left-behind*. Since then, significant progress has been achieved in establishing a care and protection system for rural children left-behind. Moreover, for the first time, the care and protection of rural children left-behind was included in the *Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Promoting Equalization of Basic Public Services*.

### Migrant children

Of the 34.26 million migrant children nationwide in 2015, 28.96 million lived in urban areas, accounting for 21.8 per cent of all urban children. That is, one out of every five children in urban areas was a migrant child. Contrary to common misperception, most migrant children live and study in the places to which they had migrated for a long period of time. Their average duration of migration was four years. Of the migrant children aged 8–13 years, more than half had a migration period of over five years. When children migrate, they lose access to their traditional community support systems, and are confronted with difficulties and discrimination in their new environment.

Despite government policies and regulations barring discrimination against children of migrants and obligating municipal governments to provide public health, education and social protection services, at times there is inadequate implementation and enforcement of these policies. For example, many migrant children are unable to attend public schools; inter-provincial migrant children who have completed compulsory education continue to face barriers to access senior secondary school education and to participate in the college entrance examination in receiving provinces, and many have to return to their home provinces where they have a

registered residence. Furthermore, being born in a city does not entitle a child to receive an urban *hukou* and thus migrant status can be retained for generations. The Government need to put forth continuous efforts to ensure equitable access to basic public services for migrant children.

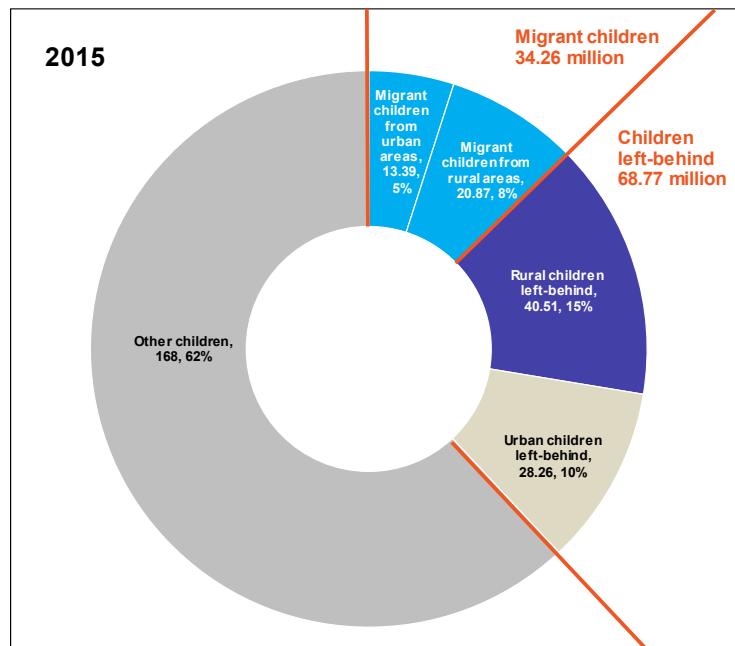
#### **Children left-behind**

Of the 68.77 million children left-behind nationwide, 40.51 million lived in rural areas, accounting for 29.4 per cent of all rural children. That is, three out of every 10 children in rural areas were children left-behind. Children left-behind are not able to live with both parents, unable to obtain adequate care from their families, including proper supervision, emotional and learning support, suitable nutrition and health care, and sufficient guidance to prevent child injury. This has had a negative impact on their physical and psychosocial development and well-being.

Although children left-behind in rural areas continue to be the focus of current policies, an increasing number of urban residents have been participating in the migration flow in the past decade. Initially unnoticed, the size of urban children left-behind has grown rapidly and reached 28.26 million in 2015, accounting for 41.1 per cent of the total number of children left-behind. At the same time, due to *in situ* urbanization, some children previously categorized as rural children left-behind are now categorized as urban children left-behind. Consequently, the Government should not only focus on ensuring the rights of rural children left-behind, it should also pay special attention to the issues faced by urban children left-behind when formulating relevant policies.

## 138 Children Affected by Migration

**Figure 10.1**  
**Number of children affected by migration and its share of the total child population, 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.

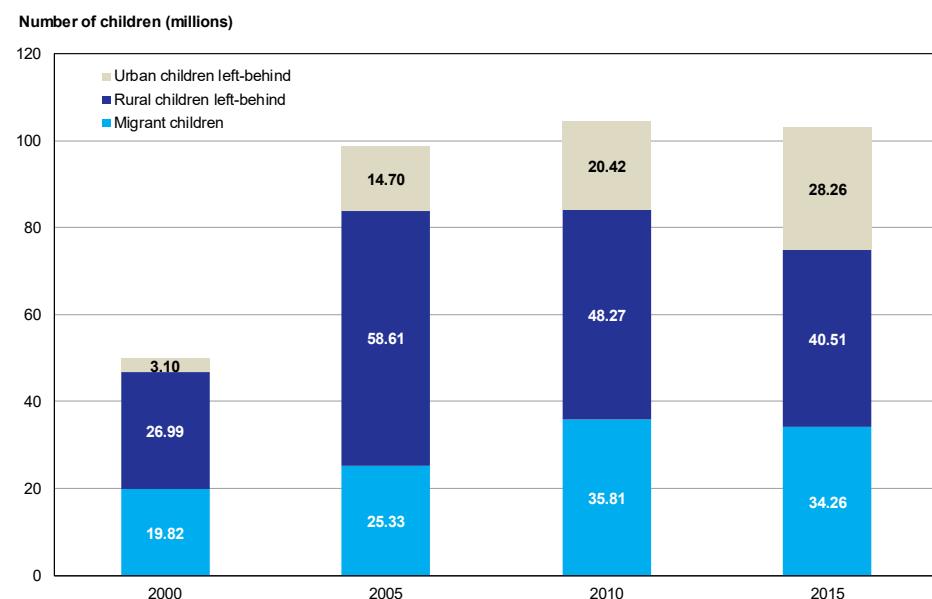
Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China, 'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.1**

In 2015, the number of migrant children aged 0–17 years was 34.26 million, and the number of children left-behind was 68.77 million. Adding these two groups together, the total number of children affected by migration reached 103 million, accounting for 38 per cent of the total child population in China.

The majority of children affected by migration came from or lived in rural areas. Of all migrant children nationwide, 60.9 per cent or 20.87 million were from rural areas (*hukou* registered in rural areas). 40.51 million children left-behind were in rural areas, accounting for 58.9 per cent of all children left-behind, and 29.4 per cent of all rural children.

**Figure 10.2**  
**Number of children affected by migration, 2000–2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China, 'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.2**

Between 2000 and 2015, both the number of migrant children and the number of children left-behind increased significantly. However, compared with figures from 2010, 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. This is consistent with the overall structural change to the urban and rural populations as a result of urbanization.

**Figure 10.3**  
**Number of migrant children,  
by province, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China,  
'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.4**  
**Number of children left-behind in rural areas,  
by province, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China,  
'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.3**

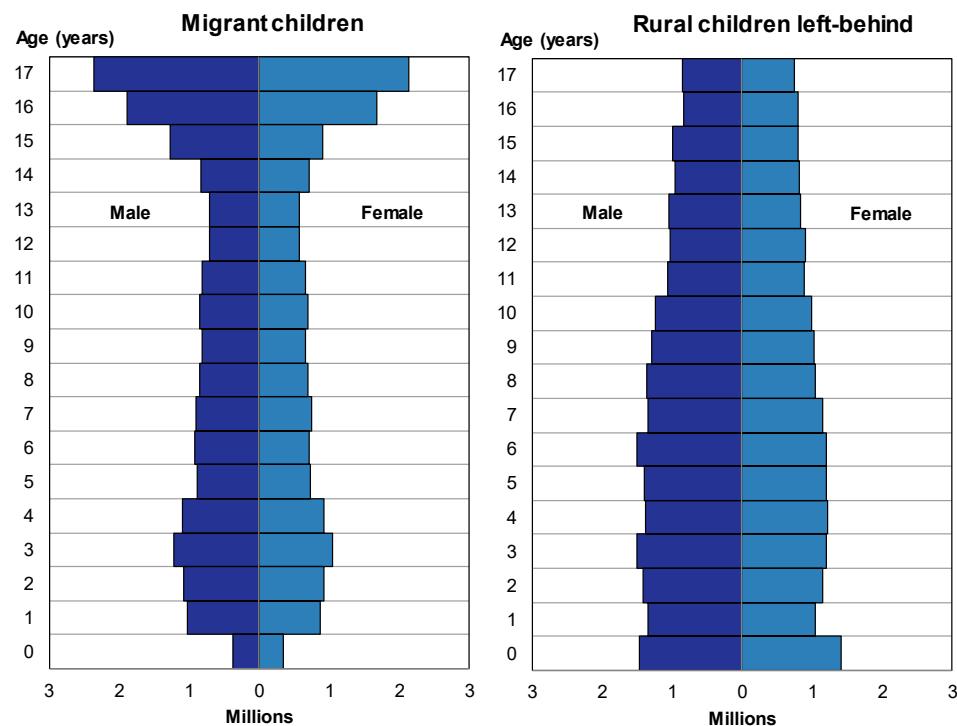
In 2015, each of nine provinces had migrant child populations of more than 1.5 million, with a total number of 19.32 million children, accounting for 56.3 per cent of migrant children in the country. In terms of the distance of migration, 71.2 per cent of migrant children migrated within their provinces of origin.

**Figure 10.4**

In 2015, each of nine provinces had more than 2 million children left-behind in rural areas, with a total number of 26.72 million children, accounting for 66 per cent of all rural children left-behind in the country. In some provinces, such as Chongqing, Sichuan and Hubei, the proportion of rural children left-behind was quite high, accounting for more than 40 per cent of the total number of rural children in each province.

## 140 Children Affected by Migration

**Figure 10.5**  
**Age distribution of migrant children and rural children left-behind, 2015**

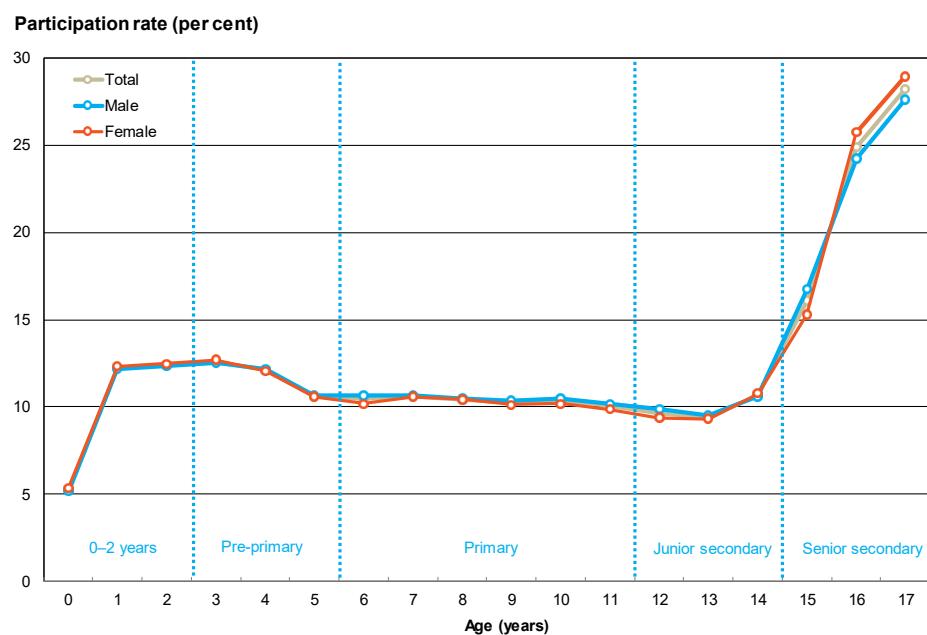


Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China, 'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.5**

Migrant children were generally either 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 the age group of preschools and primary schools.

**Figure 10.6**  
**Children's participation rate in migration, by sex and age, 2015**

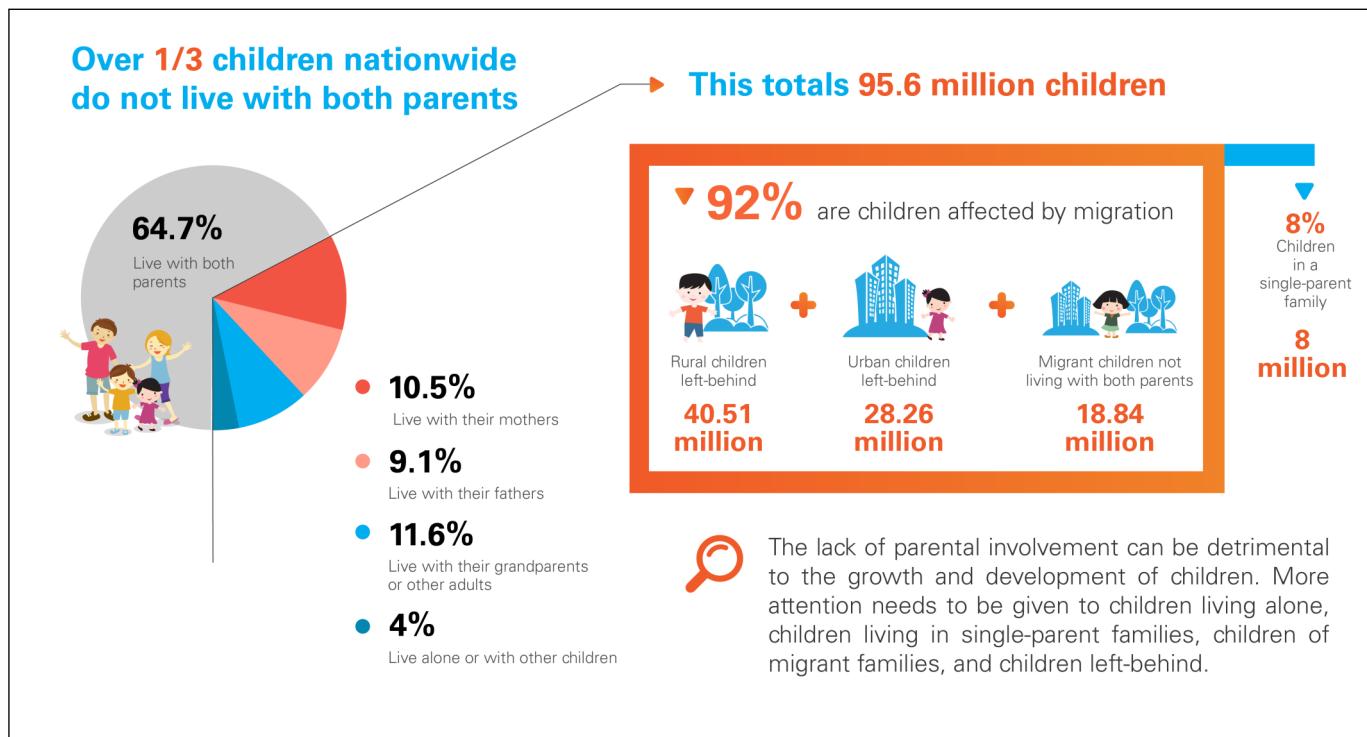


Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China, 'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.6**

Participation rates in migration among children has a clear age pattern. Children of pre-primary school age are more likely to participate in migration, indicating a high demand for child care services in the receiving areas. The participation rate in migration of school-age children has declined. Particularly, the participation rate in migration of children in junior secondary schools is lower than that in primary schools, indicating the barriers to attend schools and take the college entrance examination in the migration destinations inhibit children from participating in migration. On the other hand, migrant children aged 15–17 years are much more likely to participate in migration. This indicates 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 challenges, including social inclusion. In terms of gender, the participation rate in migration of girls in all age groups was similar to that of boys, indicating there were equal opportunities for both girls and boys to migrate with their parents and receive better care and benefits through urban resources.

**Figure 10.7**  
**Family support for children, 2015**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China,  
'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017

**Figure 10.7**

In 2015, over one third of children in China, estimated at 95.6 million, did not live with both parents for varying reasons. The majority of children not living with both parents were those affected by migration, including 40.51 million rural children left-behind, 28.26 million urban children left-behind and 18.84 million migrant children who did not live with both parents, which together accounted for more than 90 per cent of the total. In addition, over one fourth of children aged 0–2 years were taken care of by caregivers other than their mothers. The absence of parents, especially mothers, have a negative effect on children's early development, and has been found to be one of the key factors contributing to cognitive delays.

## Children Affected by Migration

### Data sources and references

<sup>1</sup> State Council, *National New Urbanization Plan (2014–2020)*, 16 March 2014, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2014-03/16/content\\_2640075.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2014-03/16/content_2640075.htm), accessed August 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Data about migrant children and children left-behind used in this chapter are estimated by Professor Duan Chengrong and the team of Renmin University of China, based on the National Population Censuses in 2000 and 2010, and 1% National Population Sample Survey in 2005 and 2015 conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. The results of the most recent data analysis for the 2015 survey are published through: National Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF China, UNFPA China, 'Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures', 2017 (<http://www.unicef.cn/en/publications/comprehensive/3210.html>); Lyu Lidan, et al., 'Changing Patterns and Development Challenges of Child Population in China', *Population Research*, vol.42, no. 3, 2018, pp. 65–78.

<sup>3</sup> **Migrant children** – Refer to 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.

<sup>4</sup> **Children left-behind** – 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 children left-behind refer to children left-behind whose household registration locations are in rural areas. Urban children left-behind refer to children left-behind whose household registration locations are in urban areas.

<sup>5</sup> In February 2016, the State Council issued the *Opinions on Strengthening Care and Protection of Rural Children Left-behind*. Subsequently, the Ministry of Civil Affairs carried out a national survey and reported the number of rural children left-behind in the country was 9.02 million. It is important to note that the 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', different from the definition used in this Atlas which states that 'at least one parent is a migrant worker, and the child is under the age of 18'.