



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.

Ethnic minority groups: China is a multi-ethnic country comprising 56 ethnic groups, including Han and 55 ethnic minority groups. According to the 2010 National Population Census, China's ethnic minority groups are, by population size: Zhuang, Hui, Manchu, Uyghur, Miao, Yi, Tujia, Tibetan, Mongolian, Dong, Bouyei, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazak, Dai, She, Lisu, Dongxiang, Gelao, Lahu, Va, Shui, Naxi, Qiang, Tu, Mulam, Xibe, Kirgiz, Jingpo, Daur, Salar, Blang, Maonan, Tajik, Pumi, Achang, Nu, Ewenki, Jing, Jino, De'ang, Bonan, Russian, Yugur, Ozbek, Moinba, Oroqen, Drung, Hezhen, Gaoshan, Lhoba and Tatar.

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.

Children left-behind: 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.

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 factsheet 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 population censuses and inter-census surveys.

Basic Information on Ethnic Minority Children

- In 2015, the number of ethnic minority children aged 0–17 in China was 31.11 million, accounting for 26.5% of the total ethnic minority population, and higher than the proportion of children in the total population of the country (19.7%). The population structure of ethnic minorities is still relatively young.
- The fertility rates among ethnic minorities are higher than the national average. Parents often register their children for ethnic minority status when one parent is part of an ethnic minority. Accordingly, the proportion of ethnic minority children in the total child population has gradually increased: it was 7.6% in 1982, rose to 11.0% in 2010, and reached 11.5% in 2015.
- Inter-marriages between different ethnic groups have contributed to the formation of mixed multi-ethnic households. In 2015, 2.7% of households in the country were mixed ethnic minority and Han households.
- The 10 ethnic minorities with the largest child population were 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.
- Since 1990, the child population size of all ethnic groups has shown varying demographic trends. On one hand, these trends are related to the rate of population reproduction, where every ethnic group is at a different stage of the demographic transition process with uneven fertility rates and infant mortality rates. On the other hand, these trends are linked to policy and socio-cultural factors, such as ethnicity status selection for children of inter-marriages between different ethnic groups. The preferential policies for minorities also play a role in the ethnicity status selection of multi-ethnic children: children of Han and ethnic minority parents tend to be registered for ethnic minority status, and those born to mixed ethnic minority parents tend to be registered with the ethnic minority status of the parent from the smaller ethnic minority group.
- There were 11.23 million ethnic minority children aged 0–5, of which 5.84 million children were of preschool education age (3–5). Moreover, there were 15.25 million ethnic minority children of compulsory education age (6–14) and 4.63 million ethnic minority children of senior secondary education age (15–17).
- 33.6% of ethnic minority children (totaling 10.45 million) resided in urban areas. The proportion of ethnic minority children residing in urban areas was significantly lower than that of Han children (51.1%).
- 60% of ethnic minority children resided in poor areas, totaling about 18.6 million, and accounting for 28.6% of the total number of children residing in 832 poverty-stricken counties.
- 45.3% of ethnic minority children (totaling 14.09 million) resided in poor rural areas. Residing in ethnic minority areas that have a higher incidence of poverty poses multiple challenges to child development.
- Consistent with the geographical distribution of ethnic minority populations, ethnic minority children are also concentrated in the southwestern provinces and autonomous regions. 62.4% of ethnic minority children were concentrated in Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Xinjiang, and Sichuan.
- In 56 prefectures of the country, ethnic minority children account for more than 50% of children in each prefecture.

Sex Ratio of Ethnic Minority Children

- In 2015, there were 16.44 million boys among ethnic minority children, accounting for 52.8%, and there were 14.67 million girls, accounting for 47.2%. The sex ratio of ethnic minority children was skewed at 112.1, but still lower than the national average (118.2). The sex ratio at birth of ethnic minority children was 110.7. While this was lower than the national average (113.5), it still deviated from the natural ratio¹.

¹ 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.

- Impacted by different social and cultural factors, the sex ratio at birth and the sex ratio of children vary greatly among ethnic minority groups. Some ethnic minority groups have severely skewed sex ratios, while others are within the normal range or have slightly skewed ratios.
- Because the Government of China adopted a relatively relaxed family planning policy for ethnic minorities, nearly half of the ethnic minority families have 2 to 3 children. The trend of rising sex ratio at birth with each subsequent child birth is also evident among ethnic minorities. The sex ratio among the first child of ethnic minority families (105) was close to the natural ratio, but the sex ratio among the second child (112), the third child and subsequent children (127) were significantly higher.

Ethnic Minority Children Affected by Migration

- 16% of the ethnic minority population were affected by migration, which was lower than the proportion of the total migrant population in the total population of the country (17.9%), indicating that the ethnic minority population has relatively low mobility. Similarly, when compared with Han children, ethnic minority children are less likely to become migrant children. The low mobility of ethnic minority populations is related to cultural customs, and to a certain extent impacted by their inadequate Mandarin language skills.
- There were 3.33 million ethnic minority migrant children, 4.74 million ethnic minority children left-behind in rural areas, and 2.09 million ethnic minority children left-behind in urban areas. Thus, a total of 10.16 million ethnic minority children were affected by migration. This translates to one third of ethnic minority children directly affected by migration.
- 68.2% of ethnic minority children lived with both parents, 18.2% lived with one parent, 4.5% lived with their grandparents, and 2.9% lived alone or with other minors. The proportion of ethnic minority children living with both parents was 3.5 percentage points higher than the national average.
- The main reason why children cannot live with both their parents is migration. The total number of ethnic minority children who cannot live with both parents was 9.88 million, of which about 90% were children affected by migration, including 6.83 million children left-behind and 1.79 million migrant children who did not live with both parents.

Education of Ethnic Minority Children

- The literacy levels of ethnic minorities have greatly improved over the past a few decades. In 1990, the illiteracy rate and semi-illiteracy rate among ethnic minority adults was as high as 30.8%. By 2015, the illiteracy rate of ethnic minorities aged 15 and above decreased to 10.1%. However, the literacy level of ethnic minority populations was still relatively behind the overall literacy level of the country. Particularly, the illiteracy rate among ethnic minorities were twice that of Han. With the universalization of nine-year compulsory education, the national illiteracy rate for youths aged 15–24 in 2015 was only 0.4%, but the illiteracy rate among ethnic minority youths was still relatively high at 1.9%.
- There are significant gender differences in the literacy levels of ethnic minority populations. The adult illiteracy rate of ethnic minority women reached 13.8%, which is 2.2 times that of ethnic minority men. For ethnic minority youths aged 15–24, the illiteracy rate was 2.4% among females, one percentage point higher than that of males.
- The school attendance rate of ethnic minority children is lower than the national average at all levels of education. With the increase in age, especially after entering senior secondary education, the school attendance rate of ethnic minority children drops sharply. The school attendance rate of ethnic minority children in primary education (aged 6–11) was 92.2%, in junior secondary education (aged 12–14) was 93.9%, and in senior secondary education (aged 15–17) was only 72.4%. The school attendance rate in senior secondary education among ethnic minority children was 13 percentage points lower than the national average.
- There are urban-rural differences in the school attendance rate of ethnic minority children at all age groups, and the differences become more evident with the increase in age. In senior secondary education, the school attendance rate of ethnic minority children in urban areas was 12 percentage points higher than that in rural areas.

- In terms of the school attendance rate, there are no obvious gender differences among ethnic minority children in primary and junior secondary education. However, the school attendance rate of ethnic minority boys is 3.8 percentage points lower than that of ethnic minority girls in senior secondary education.
- The proportion of out-of-school ethnic minority children aged 6–17 was 11.9%, corresponding to about 2.37 million children. After deducting 490,000 ethnic minority children not enrolled in school at the age 6, there were 1.88 million out-of-school ethnic minority children aged 7–17, including 1.28 million children (aged 15–17) of senior secondary education age. About 70% of older ethnic minority children terminated their studies to enter the labour market for employment.
- 7.4% of ethnic minority children aged 6–17 did not receive or complete compulsory education as required², which is more than twice the corresponding national average. Based on this estimate, there are about 1.47 million ethnic minority children who did not receive or complete compulsory education, of which 76.9% resided in rural areas. If the 490,000 ethnic minority children not yet enrolled in school at age 6 are disregarded, there were still 980,000 ethnic minority children aged 7–17 that did not receive or complete compulsory education.
- Studies have shown that delay in school enrollment is one of the key reasons that school-age children terminate their studies. Han and ethnic minority children have varying extent of delayed enrollment at all stages of education, and delayed enrollment among ethnic minority children is more severe.

Marriage and Childbearing Practices of Ethnic Minority Adolescents

- The proportion of married ethnic minority adolescents aged 15–19 was 3.9%, which is significantly higher than that of the Han adolescents (1.3%). There were about 300,000 married ethnic minority adolescents aged 15–19, accounting for a quarter of all married adolescents in the country.
- It is apparent that adolescent girls make up the majority of the married population aged 15–19. The married population of ethnic minority girls aged 15–19 was 230,000, accounting for three quarters of the married population of all ethnic minorities in this age bracket.
- The fertility rate of ethnic minority adolescent girls aged 15–19 was 28 births per 1,000 women, which is four times that of Han adolescent girls. The fertility rate of ethnic minority adolescents is equivalent to the average rate of adolescent fertility in Asia, but it is still considered a low fertility rate globally.

Ethnic Minority Children with Pending Hukou Status

- A total of 573,000 ethnic minority children aged 0–17 had pending *Hukou* status. This figure accounts for 82.3% of the total ethnic minority population with pending *Hukou* status (700,000) and 1.8% of all ethnic minority children. There were 489,000 ethnic minority children under five with pending *Hukou* status, accounting for 5.2% of all ethnic minority children under five. There were 278,000 ethnic minority children under one with pending *Hukou* status, accounting for 16.9% of all ethnic minority children under one.
- Compared with Han children, ethnic minority children are more likely to have pending *Hukou* status. There were 4.34 million children with pending *Hukou* status in the country, accounting for 1.6% of the total number of children. This was lower than the proportion of ethnic minority children with pending *Hukou* status among all ethnic minority children.
- 63.9% of ethnic minority children with pending *Hukou* status resided in rural areas.
- Ethnic minority children with pending *Hukou* status were mainly younger children, with children aged 0–2 accounting for 73.7%. With the increase in age, some children previously with pending *Hukou* status were registered for reasons such as school enrollment.
- Among ethnic minority children with pending *Hukou* status, there were 283,000 boys and 290,000 girls. The sex ratio is 97.6, which is much lower than the sex ratio of all minority children (112.1).

² 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, people 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.