



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

China: Contravention of the population and family planning law and single and unmarried mothers

Version 5.0

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Executive summary

In the late 1970s, China introduced a family planning policy. This required ethnic Han couples to limit their children to one and imposed fines (social maintenance fees) where children were born in excess of the policy. A decline in population and birth rates and a rapidly aging population led to the policy being amended in 2015 to allow couples to have 2 children. In 2021 it was amended again to allow married couples to have 3 children and the social maintenance fees were abolished.

Women who gave birth in breach of China's family planning scheme constitute a particular social group (PSG).

Social maintenance fees are no longer part of the family planning policy. Evidence suggests that where a person had a child in excess of policy they are unlikely to incur these fees, including where their child was born prior to the 2021 amendment to the policy. Even where a person can show that they will still incur these fees in general, this will not be sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to reach the threshold of persecution or serious harm.

Since the introduction of the amended family planning policy in 2021 there is no evidence that forced sterilisation or abortions take place, outside of Xinjiang, to enforce family planning policy. Those claiming to originate from outside of Xinjiang and claiming to be at risk of forced sterilisation and/or forced abortion on return to China are unlikely to face persecution or serious harm from the state.

Where the claim relates to someone from the Xinjiang area decision makers must refer to the Country Policy and Information Note [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#).

Single or unmarried mothers are not mentioned in the national family planning law and therefore any children born to a single or unmarried mother are considered outside of the policy. Single or unmarried mothers may be subject to social compensation fees and may face difficulty accessing pre-natal services as proof of marriage is often required.

A single or unmarried mother is unlikely to face persecution or serious harm from the state. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise, and each case must be considered on its facts.

A person who fears the state is unlikely to obtain protection. Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

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Assessment

Section updated: 10 June 2025

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the state because they have contravened the Population and Family Planning law, also referred to previously as the one-child policy or they are a single or unmarried mother.
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- a claim, if refused, is likely or not to be certified as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when such a check has not already been undertaken (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- 1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed membership of a particular social group (PSG).
- 2.1.2 In the country guidance case of [AX \(Family Planning Scheme\) China CG \[2012\] UKUT 00097 \(IAC\)](#) (16 April 2012), heard on 8 and 9 December 2009, 29 November 2010 and 19 December 2011, the ~Upper Tribunal (UT) accepted that ‘women who gave birth in breach of China’s family planning scheme’ constitute a particular social group within the meaning of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (paragraph 191(12)).
- 2.1.3 Single and unmarried mothers were not considered in the country guidance case of [AX](#). However, they form a PSG in China within the meaning of the Refugee Convention because they share an innate characteristic or a common background that cannot be changed (being a mother) and have a distinct identity in China because the group (being single or unmarried) is perceived as being different by the surrounding society.
- 2.1.4 Although women who gave birth in breach of China’s family planning scheme and single/unmarried mothers form a PSG, establishing such membership is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their membership of such a group.
- 2.1.5 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3. Risk

3.1 Overview of the Family Planning Law and policy

- 3.1.1 Following rapid population growth, the family planning policy was introduced in 1979 requiring married ethnic Han couples to limit their children to one.

Where children were born not in compliance with the law and regulations, couples were subject to a social maintenance fee (or social upbringing charge). Ethnic and rural families who had a daughter as their first child were exempt from the policy (see [Background to the one child policy](#)).

- 3.1.2 The policy, combined with other factors, caused a significant decline in birth rates, population growth, and a rapidly aging population which led the government to amend the policy in 2015 to allow all married couples to have 2 children. Couples who had up to 2 children were not required to obtain birth permits from the government (see [Introduction of the two-child policy](#)).
- 3.1.3 The change in policy did not lead to an increase in births and in 2021 the 2 child policy was relaxed to allow married couples to have 3 children (see [Legislation](#) and [Introduction of the three-child policy](#)).
- 3.1.4 China is facing a shrinking and rapidly ageing population with couples now choosing to postpone marriage and childbirth. Enforcing child limits is now a low priority for the government and there is no longer encouragement for 'late' marriage and 'late' births. The updated 3 child policy continues to apply across China (see [Demography](#) and [Introduction of the three-child policy](#)).
- 3.1.5 Several initiatives have been announced, and are in the process of implementation, aimed at boosting the birth rate and 'reducing the burden' of raising a child. These include encouraging local governments to offer subsidies and extended parental leave, cash handouts, flexible working, increasing women's employment rights and improving childcare infrastructure. Party leaders have continued to emphasise the importance of population growth with national campaigns encouraging births, and pro-natal messaging, through public artworks, posters and slogans (see [Government incentives to encourage more births](#)).
- 3.1.6 Children born in violation of the policy, known as Heihaizi (or 'black children'), were previously denied hukou (household) registration which enables access to services. In 2015 President Xi announced that the hukou would be provided for the nearly 13 million unregistered children who were born 'out of plan'. Whilst retroactive registration can be sought from authorities, there may still be difficulties in getting records updated although this is mostly due to administration process at the local government level and attitudes of individual, local officials rather than official policy (see [Registration of children born in contravention of the previous family planning policies](#)).
- 3.1.7 Children born outside of China are entitled to Chinese nationality if one of their parents is a Chinese citizen and they would be linked to their parents hukou. Whilst hukou can be cancelled for those who have been out of the country for more than a year, in practice cancellation rarely occurs (see [Children born overseas](#)).
- 3.1.8 Although recent reforms and incentives aim to encourage childbirth under the three-child policy, country information indicates that women of childbearing age face employment discrimination. Employers may avoid hiring women perceived as likely to become pregnant, particularly in lower-skilled roles, due to concerns over maternity leave and costs. Discriminatory practices include pregnancy-related questions during interviews, forced anti-pregnancy agreements, and even illegal pregnancy tests. While legal protections exist, enforcement is weak, and redress mechanisms are often

ineffective (see [Discrimination](#)).

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3.2 Financial and administrative penalties

- 3.2.1 Financial and administrative penalties have been abolished and are unlikely to be imposed by the state. Even if a person were to face penalties, they are unlikely to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.2.2 With the introduction of the 3-child policy in August 2021, articles 41 and 42 of the Population and Family Planning law, related to penalties for those who violated birth restrictions, were removed. Social maintenance fees have been abolished and penalties such as loss of employment for having children in excess of the policy have been removed (see [Legislation, Introduction of the three-child policy](#) and [Enforcement of the family planning policy \(including fee penalties\)](#)).
- 3.2.3 In April 2025 a diplomatic source noted that they were not aware of any cases where fees were applied to those who have children in excess of the policy. The Australia Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) noted in rare cases fees may still need to be paid as policies were not uniformly enforced across China. However, there was 'low' enforcement, including for those who had children in excess of the policy prior to the 2021 amendment and no known examples of imprisonment for non-payment of fines since 2019 (see [Enforcement of the family planning policy \(including fee penalties\)](#)).
- 3.2.4 In the country guidance case of [AX](#) the UT held that: 'The financial consequences for a family of losing its [Single-Child Parent Certificate] SCP (for having more than one child) and/or of having [Social Upbringing Charge] SUC imposed (for having unauthorised children) and/or suffering disadvantages in terms of access to education, medical treatment, loss of employment, detriment to future employment etc will not, in general, reach the severity threshold to amount to persecution or serious harm or treatment in breach of Article 3' (paragraph 191(9)).
- 3.2.5 Since the promulgation of [AX](#) the Family Planning Scheme (policy) has been significantly reformed and relaxed. The most recent change in August 2021 allows married couples to have 3 children and removes the requirement to pay a fee or penalty for having children outside of the policy. In rare cases local authorities or officials may arbitrarily apply the fee in contravention of the policy, and a family may experience disadvantages in terms of access to services and employment, but these are unlikely to amount to persecution or serious harm. The country information in this note indicates that the UT's findings in AX continue to apply: there are not 'very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence' to depart from it (see [Introduction of the two-child policy](#) and [Introduction of the three-child policy](#)).
- 3.2.6 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.3 Forced sterilisations and abortions

- 3.3.1 Women are unlikely to be at risk of persecution or serious harm by the state through forced sterilisation and/or forced abortion. The onus is on the person

to demonstrate otherwise.

- 3.3.2 Where the claim relates to a person from Xinjiang area, including women who fear forced sterilisation and/or abortion, decision makers must refer to the Country Policy and Information Note [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#).

- 3.3.3 In [AX](#), the UT held that:

‘In general, for female returnees, there is no real risk of forcible sterilisation or forcible termination in China. However, if a female returnee who has already had her permitted quota of children is being returned at a time when there is a crackdown in her “hukou” area, accompanied by unlawful practices such as forced abortion or sterilisation, such a returnee would be at real risk of forcible sterilisation, or, if she is pregnant at the time, of forcible termination of an unauthorised pregnancy. Outside these times, such a female returnee may also be able to show an individual risk, notwithstanding the absence of a general risk, where there is credible evidence that she, or members of her family remaining in China, have been threatened with, or have suffered, serious adverse ill-treatment by reason of her breach of the family planning scheme.

‘Where a female returnee is at real risk of forcible sterilisation or termination of pregnancy in her “hukou” area, such risk is of persecution ...

‘Male returnees do not, in general, face a real risk of forcible sterilisation, whether in their “hukou” area or elsewhere, given the very low rate of sterilisation of males overall and the even lower rate of forcible sterilisation.’ (paragraph 191(subparagraphs 11 to 13)).

- 3.3.4 There have been several changes to the Population and Family Planning law since the promulgation of [AX](#) in 2012, and government focus has turned to population growth rather than restriction. There is no indication in the sources consulted that the implementation of family planning laws, including ‘crackdowns’ in hukou areas, which in the past led to forced sterilisations or abortions continue to occur in China (the situation in Xinjiang has not been considered in this note). Diplomatic sources also stated in 2022, and confirmed in 2025, that they were not aware of evidence that forced sterilisation or abortions have taken place in recent years (see [Abortion, sterilisation and birth control](#)).

- 3.3.5 The available country information continues to indicate there is no real risk of forcible sterilisation or forcible termination in China. Additionally, given the change in family planning policy, this includes women who have had or are pregnant with children in excess of the 3 child quota. Therefore there are ‘very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence’ to depart from the findings made in paragraphs 191(11 and 12) of [AX](#).

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3.4 Single and unmarried mothers

- 3.4.1 A single or unmarried mother is unlikely to face persecution or serious harm from the state. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.4.2 Unmarried women who have children outside of family planning laws may suffer disadvantages in terms of access to education, medical treatment, loss of employment and detriment to future employment, which may be more

acute for those in rural areas. However, in general, this this will not reach the severity threshold to amount to persecution or serious harm or treatment in breach of Article 3 ECHR.

- 3.4.3 There is limited reliable data on the number of single parent households, including unmarried or never married women. A couple of sources estimated that around one per cent (24 / 25 million) of families are single parent and one source suggested that 3.5% of families are single mothers this may include those who are unmarried, divorced or widowed. Divorced mothers raising children singularly are more common in urban areas and among educated women. Although the number of single parent families remains low in comparison to the total population of China, they are becoming more common (see [Single parent families](#)).
- 3.4.4 Single (i.e. unmarried) mothers are not mentioned in the national family planning law and any children born to a single mother is considered outside the policy. Despite this, social support fees were previously imposed on single mothers, and they could be denied birth registration and hukou. Since 2021 social support fees have been scrapped and although there is no national policy removing marriage as a requirement for birth registration, local governments rarely enforce regulations to deny children born outside of marriage legal documentation. Some provinces, at a local level, have removed the requirement for couples to be married to register births altogether (see [Single and unmarried mothers](#)).
- 3.4.5 Single and unmarried women have faced difficulty accessing prenatal care as proof of marriage was often requested to access these services. However, the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) announced in 2022 the removal of the requirement to submit a marriage certificate to access maternity services as part of the wider policies to support population growth. Local governments in some areas also relaxed their policies to allow single/unmarried mothers to access maternity benefits (see [Changes in policies](#)).
- 3.4.6 In 2022 the government amended the Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law relating to gender equality, to ban employers from enquiring about an applicant's marital or maternal status or making such status a condition for employment (see [Discrimination](#)).
- 3.4.7 Legislative proposals in 2024 suggested improved avenues of redress for women who were dismissed or experienced unfair work conditions due to maternity. Although government messaging continues to promote marriage and family values alongside the drive to increase the birth rate, other legislative proposals seek to assist single women such allowing single women to have access to assistive reproductive technology (such as egg freezing which at the time of writing was not permitted for single women in China), and to implement hukou for children born to single women (see [Legislation](#) and [Government messaging to encourage more births](#)).
- 3.4.8 Traditional family values remain strong in China and children born out of wedlock are still relatively rare, particularly in rural areas. Single and unmarried mothers may face social stigma and societal discrimination although community views may be becoming more tolerant. Wealthier, urban women may be more able to mitigate against negative societal attitudes and discrimination in employment (see [Discrimination](#)).

- 3.4.9 The country guidance case of [AX](#) did not consider single mothers as they are not within scope of the family planning policy.
- 3.4.10 In the country guidance case of [HC & RC \(Trafficked women\) China CG \[2009\] UKAIT 00027](#) promulgated on 18 July 2009, heard on 11 November 2008, considering the position of trafficked women on return, the UT held that: ‘The Chinese state has an obligation to house the homeless and will not allow their citizens to starve. Therefore, a returned trafficked woman without family support will not be allowed by the authorities to fall into a state of destitution.’ (paragraph 82 (3))
- 3.4.11 Whilst the country guidance case relates to trafficked women, the state’s obligation to house the homeless applies to the population in general and therefore the principle behind the determination is relevant to single and unmarried mothers (see [Resources for single mothers and those without support](#)).
- 3.4.12 The UT in [HC & RC](#) also held that: ‘Pre-marital sex is now commonplace in China and women’s earning power growing, particularly in the wealthy cities of the east. As a result, the number of single mothers in China is growing, albeit from a small base and although a birth permit may not be obtained, nonetheless it is possible for hukou for the child of a single mother to be obtained depending upon where the application is made.’ (paragraph 82 (5))
- 3.4.13 Since the promulgation of [HC & RC](#) the number of single parent families has continued to rise and it is now easier for single parents to obtain hukou (see [Single parent families](#) and [Hukou \(household registration\) system](#)).
- 3.4.14 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection.
- 4.1.2 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 Where a woman is able to demonstrate a risk of persecution by a local administration’s or local state official’s misapplication of the law, then she may be able to relocate depending on her circumstances.
- 5.1.3 China is a very large country with around 1.4 billion people and many large cities such as (but not limited to) Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen where a person may be able to relocate to escape a localised risk.
- 5.1.4 In [AX](#), the Upper Tribunal held that ‘where a real risk from State officials exists in the “hukou” area, it may be possible to avoid the risk by moving to a

city. Millions of Chinese internal migrants, male and female, live and work in cities where they do not hold an “hukou”. Internal migrant women are required to stay in touch with their “hukou” area and either return for tri-monthly pregnancy tests or else send back test results. The country evidence does not indicate a real risk of effective pursuit of internal migrant women leading to forcible family planning actions, sterilisation or termination taking place in their city of migration. Therefore, internal relocation will, in almost all cases, avert the risk in the “hukou” area. However, internal relocation may not be safe where there is credible evidence of individual pursuit of the returnee or her family outside the “hukou” area. Whether it is unduly harsh to expect an individual returnee and her family to relocate in this way will be a question of fact in each case’ (para 191(14)).

- 5.1.5 Although the country guidance case of [AX](#) was based on evidence obtained over thirteen years ago, the recent country information relating to internal relocation does not suggest that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to warrant a departure from these findings.
- 5.1.6 For further guidance on considering internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **9 June 2025**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Throughout the document the Population and Family Planning Law (PFP law) is also referred to as the family planning policy and family planning scheme.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

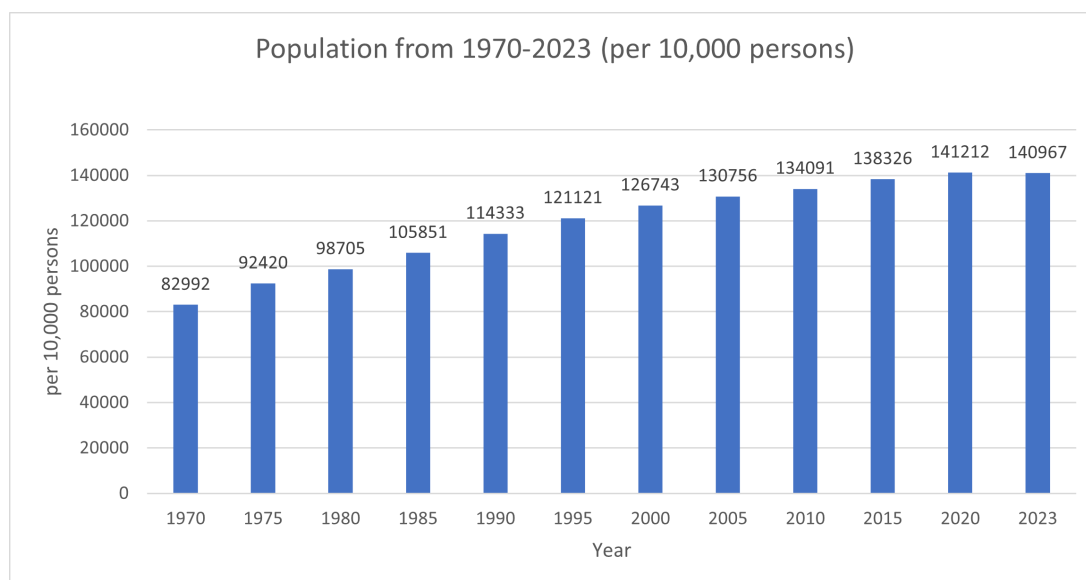
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7. Demography

7.1 Population

7.1.1 The US CIA World factbook estimated China's population to be around 1.41 billion¹.

7.1.2 Statistics from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024, published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in the following graph created by CPIT².



7.1.3 Population Matters, a UK-based charity which undertakes population research population³, noted that: '... despite a slight uptick in births last year,

¹ CIA, [China - The World Factbook](#), last updated 7 May 2025

² National Bureau of Statistics of China, [China Statistical Yearbook 2024 \(section 2-1\)](#), 2024

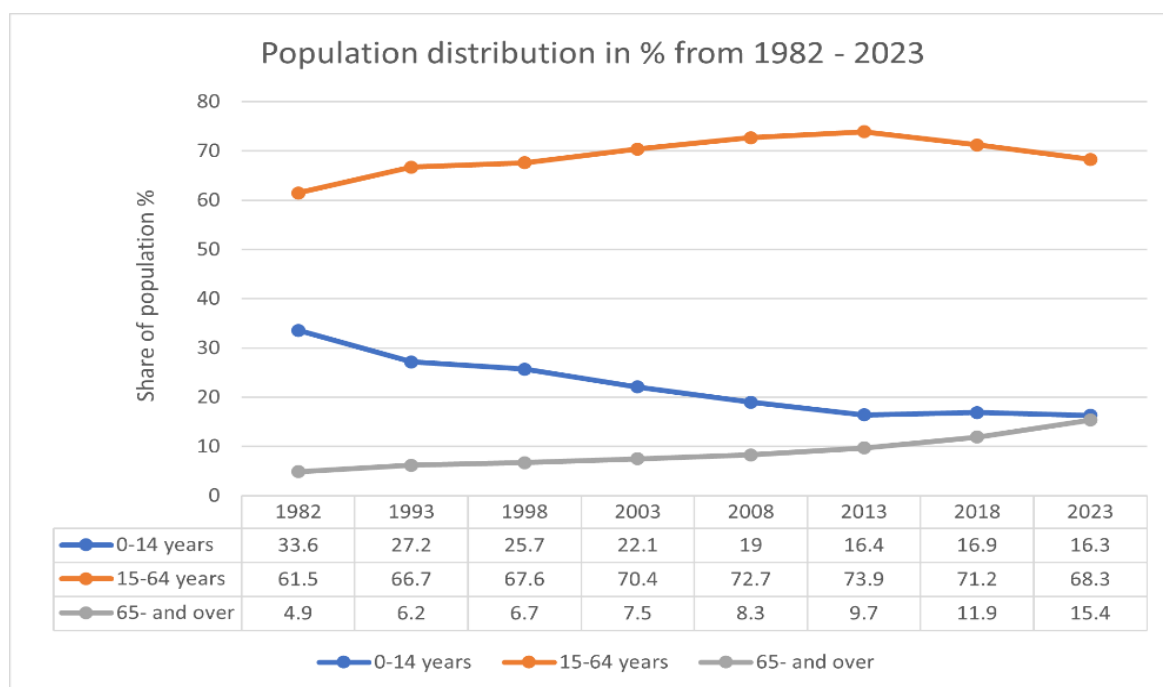
³ Population Matters, [About us](#), no date

China's population has continued to decline. Its population has dropped to 1.409 billion – a 2.08 million decrease from 2022.⁴

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7.2 Age structure

- 7.2.1 Statistics from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024, published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China show that in 2023 16.3% of the population were 0-14 years of age, 68.3% were 15-64 years of age and 15.4% were ages 65 and over⁵.
- 7.2.2 Using 2023 data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024 CPIT produced the following chart showing the population's age structure distribution from 1982 to 2023 (the most recent year)⁶. The data shows a steady decline in the number of the population aged 0-14 years and a gradual incline of those aged 65 and over.



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7.3 Number of married couples

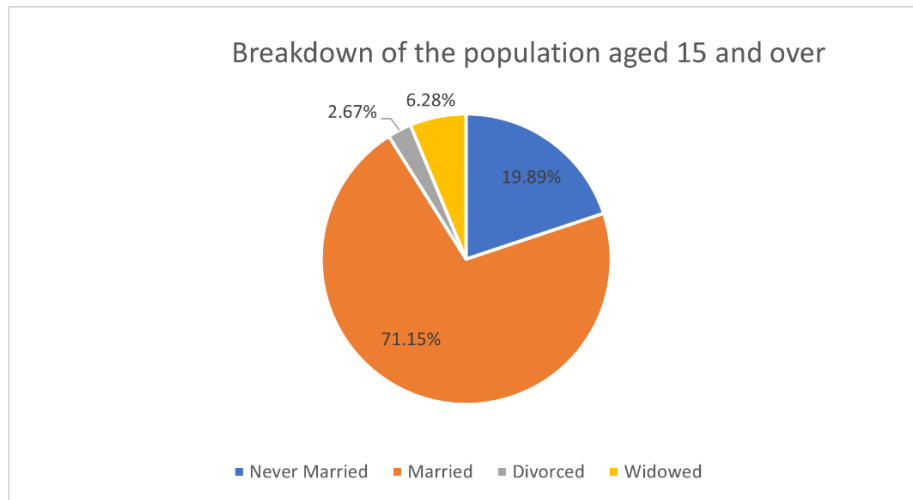
- 7.3.1 Using 2023 data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024 CPIT produced the following chart showing the marital status of the population aged 15 and over⁷.

⁴ Population Matters, [China's Reproductive Rights: Calls for a Childbirth Culture](#), 6 February 2025

⁵ National Bureau of Statistics of China, [China Statistical Yearbook 2024 \(section 2-4\)](#), 2024

⁶ National Bureau of Statistics of China, [China Statistical Yearbook 2024 \(section 2-4\)](#), 2024

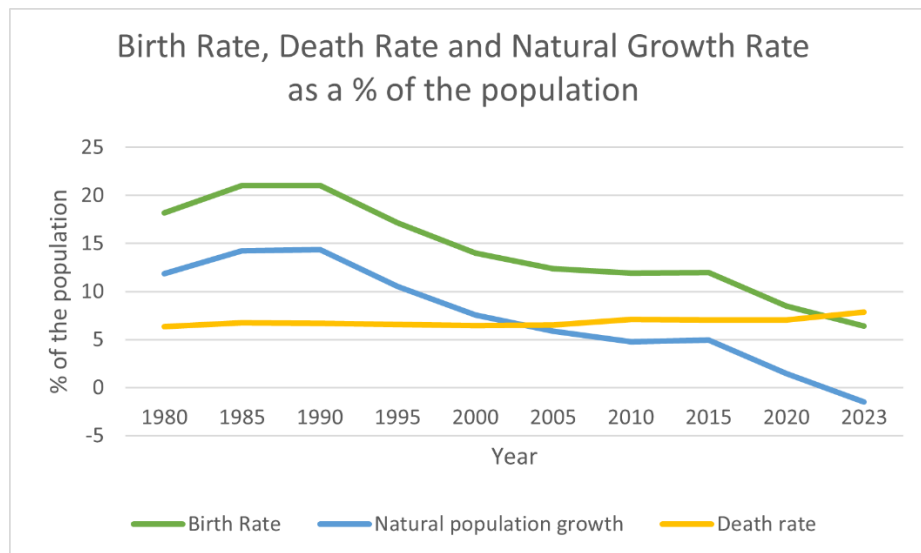
⁷ National Bureau of Statistics of China, [China Statistical Yearbook 2024 \(section 2-12\)](#), 2024



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7.4 Birth rates

- 7.4.1 Using 2023 data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024 CPIT produced the following chart showing the birth rate and natural growth rate (% of the population) from 1980 to 2023⁸.



- 7.4.2 CNN, noted in a November 2024 article that: ‘Many are postponing marriage and childbirth – and a growing number of young people even choose to eschew them entirely. The decline in both marriages and births is partly due to decades of policies designed to limit China’s population growth, which resulted in fewer young people of marriageable age, according to Chinese officials and sociologists.’⁹
- 7.4.3 Population Matters, a UK-based charity which undertakes population research population¹⁰, noted that in 2024 China saw a rise in births for the first time since 2017. The number of births recorded was 9.54 million, up from 9.02 million in 2024. However, the article went on to note that:
- ‘Many experts put this down to it being the Year of the Dragon in the Chinese Zodiac calendar, where it’s believed that children born in that year

⁸ National Bureau of Statistics of China, [China Statistical Yearbook 2024 \(section 2-2\)](#), 2024

⁹ CNN, [China on track to record its lowest number of new marriages, official](#), 4 November 2024

¹⁰ Population Matters, [About us](#), no date

will be destined for great success and fortune...

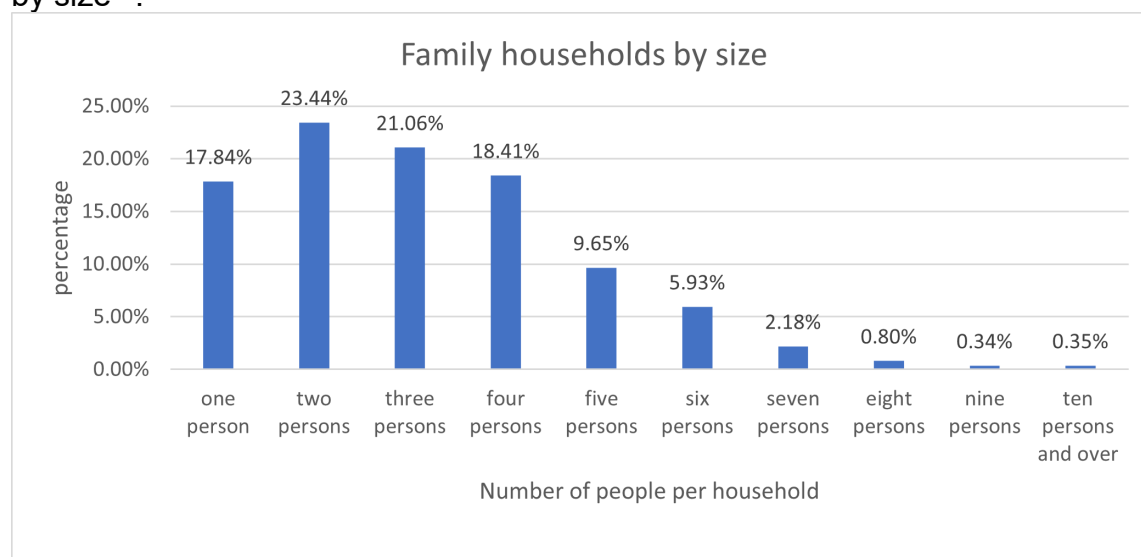
'China's population decline is due to a low birth rate, below the replacement rate of 2.1 which is required for a population to maintain a constant size. This is part of a broader demographic transition that mirrors other high-income countries. As China has rapidly deindustrialised, its workforce has moved into the service sector. The population has become more educated and skilled, with more women in the workforce, meaning people start families later and have fewer children. However, this population decline has sparked concern among government officials who fear a future economic downturn and have begun to pressure younger generations, women particularly, into having more children.'¹¹

- 7.4.4 South China Morning Post, a Hong Kong headquartered news media company reporting on China and Asia, noted in an article from January 2025 that: 'China's population fell for a third consecutive year in 2024, with a modest rise in new births outnumbered by deaths as the country's collective age continues to creep upwards and deepen the demographic crisis. ... In all, 9.54 million babies were born last year, up from the 9.02 million newborns – the lowest total since record-keeping started in 1949 – reported for 2023. Meanwhile, about 10.93 million people died, pushing the death rate to a five-decade high.'¹²

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7.5 Family composition

- 7.5.1 The following chart has been composed using 2023 data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024 and shows the number of people per households by size¹³.



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7.6 Single parent families

- 7.6.1 China Daily, a Chinese state English language newspaper¹⁴, noted in 2023 that: 'According to statistics released by the All-China Women's Federation

¹¹ Population Matters, [China's Reproductive Rights: Calls for a Childbirth Culture](#), 6 February 2025

¹² SCMP, [China's population drops for third year in a row despite uptick in births](#), 17 January 2025

¹³ National Bureau of Statistics of China, [China Statistical Yearbook 2024](#), 2024

¹⁴ BBC News, [China media guide](#), 22 August 2023

last year [2022], there are more than 24 million single-parent families in China — 70 percent of them are single mothers — and the number continues to rise. That's about seven single mothers for every 200 families [3.5%].'¹⁵

- 7.6.2 Sixth Tone, a team of writers, editors and researchers covering news from China¹⁶, noted in their article from 2024 that:

‘Contrary to common perceptions, data shows that single-mother families are more common than expected. According to the 2022 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), around 0.9% of minors — roughly one in every 100 children — live with single mothers, including those who are widowed, divorced, or unmarried.

‘... Zhang Chunni, an associate professor of Sociology at Peking University, offers insights in her 2019 book “Children From Divorced Families in China.” Her research shows that single mothers who choose to raise children after divorce are more common in urban areas among well-educated women. These women earn an average annual income of 17,000 yuan (\$2,338) [£1,852¹⁷], higher than that of dual-parent or single-father families.’¹⁸

- 7.6.3 Asia News Network (ANN)¹⁹, a regional alliance of national daily newspapers in Asia, noted in their article from 2025 that:

‘Four years ago, there were approximately 30 million single mothers in China, according to statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs. In families in which the parents divorced, only one in six fathers chooses to raise their children, meaning that 83 percent of these families are headed by single mothers, the data showed.

‘Almost two in three, or 64.6 percent, of single mothers are hesitant to disclose their single-parent status, according to the 2018 Living Conditions and Needs of Single Mothers in Ten Cities report. This is primarily due to concerns about being judged or criticized by those around them, the respondents said.’²⁰

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8. Legal context

8.1 Constitution

- 8.1.1 Article 25 of the Constitution states that: ‘The state promotes family planning so that population growth may fit the plans for economic and social development.’²¹

- 8.1.2 Article 49 states that ‘... Both husband and wife have the duty to practice family planning.’²²

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¹⁵ China Daily, [Hotline provides legal advice and hope for women in need](#), 22 August 2023

¹⁶ Sixth Tone, [About us](#), no date

¹⁷ Xe.com, [17,000 CNY to GBP](#), 26 February 2025

¹⁸ Sixth Tone, [Beyond the Stigma: Chinese Single Mothers Redefining Family...](#), 9 December 2024

¹⁹ Asia News Network (ANN), [About us](#), No date

²⁰ Asia News Network (ANN), [Rise in single mothers reflects changing face of...](#), 19 May 2025

²¹ [Constitution of the People's Republic of China](#), 1982 (revised in 2018)

²² [Constitution of the People's Republic of China](#), 1982 (revised in 2018)

8.2 Legislation

- 8.2.1 The amended Population and Family Planning Law (PFP law) was adopted in August 2021²³. CPIT could not find an English version of the new law, however the 2001 law, which does not include the changes to the law is available on [Refworld](#)²⁴. The amendments to the law are explained below.
- 8.2.2 Article 18 of the PFP law stated that every married couple is now allowed to have up to 3 children, the rest of the article remained unchanged and specified that more children may be allowed subject to law and regulations being met²⁵.
- 8.2.3 The 2021 law also removed Articles 41 and 42. These articles enforced penalties for those who had violated birth restrictions, including social maintenance fees and penalties employees were subject to at work such as terminations and being banned from working as civil servants if they were born in violation of the policy^{26 27 28}.
- 8.2.4 NPC Observer, a site providing English readers access to China's national legislature²⁹, the National People's Congress (NPC) and its Standing Committee (NPCSC), explained the amended family planning law:
- 'The amendment introduces a raft of other measures to boost childbirths. It encourages localities to provide for parental leave [父母育儿假] (art. 25, para. 2). It vows to provide employment services to women whose jobs have been affected by childbirths (art. 26, para. 1) and to ease the burden of childbirths, childrearing, and education on families through supportive measures including tax, insurance, housing, and employment (art. 27). The amendment, moreover, directs local governments to establish "inclusive childcare service systems" [普惠托幼服务体系] to increase the "accessibility and fairness" of childcare services (art. 28). Finally, it directs local governments to build adequate playgrounds for babies and young children and requires public places and "employers with relatively large numbers of female employees" to install facilities for nursing mothers (art. 30).'³⁰
- 8.2.5 Human Rights Watch reported that in November 2022: '... the government amended the Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law, the highest law concerning gender equality in the country, for the first time in nearly 30 years. Among the provisions to combat gender discrimination in the workplace, the law banned employers from inquiring or investigating the marital and maternal status of female job applicants or making such status a condition for employment.'³¹

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9. Family planning law

²³ NPC Observer, [Population and Family Planning Law](#), no date

²⁴ Refworld, [China: Law of 2001, Population and Family Planning Law](#), 29 December 2001

²⁵ LOC, [Three-Child Policy Becomes Law, Social Maintenance Fee Abolished](#), 23 September 2021

²⁶ NPC Observer, [NPCSC Codifies Three-Child Policy, Expands Legal Aid & ...](#), 24 August 2021

²⁷ LOC, [Three-Child Policy Becomes Law, Social Maintenance Fee Abolished](#), 23 September 2021

²⁸ Global Times, [China scraps 3 regulations on family planning, including ...](#), 26 September 2021

²⁹ NPC Observer, [About Us](#), no date

³⁰ NPC Observer, [NPCSC Codifies Three-Child Policy, Expands Legal Aid & ...](#), 24 August 2021

³¹ HRW, [It's time to abolish China's three-child policy](#), 22 February 2023

9.1 Background to the one child policy

- 9.1.1 Following population growth in the 1970's China initially ran a birth control campaign using the slogan "Late, Long and Few". This led to decreased population growth between 1970 and 1976 but towards the end of the 70's that drop had started to level off. In 1979 the government introduced a policy requiring married ethnic Han couples to limit their children to one³², with ethnic minority and rural families who had a daughter as their first child being exempt from the policy for most of its history³³.
- 9.1.2 Article 18 of the PFP law encouraged 'late' marriage, 'late' childbearing and one child per couple. A second child may have been allowed but only where specified laws and regulations were met. Where children were born not in compliance with the law and regulations, couples were subject to a social maintenance fee³⁴. The law also offered incentives to single child couples such as longer maternity leave³⁵.
- 9.1.3 Chinese officials have stated that the implementation of the one child policy prevented over 400 million births^{36 37} and contributed to China's economic growth since the 1980's. Estimates also suggest that during the 30 years the policy was in place billions of dollars were collected in fines from those who had an additional child³⁸.

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9.2 Introduction of the two-child policy

- 9.2.1 On 27 December 2015 the one child policy was amended to allow married couples to have 2 children. The law came into effect on 1 January 2016. Under Article 18 couples were no longer encouraged or rewarded for having late marriages and late childbearing. The law did state that compliance with the law and regulations may be rewarded by grants of extended leave or other benefits. Couples who had no more than 2 children were no longer required to obtain birth permits from government authorities³⁹.

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9.3 Introduction of the three-child policy

- 9.3.1 The relaxation of the one child policy to allow couples to have 2 children did not encourage couples to have a second child. Many cited the high cost of raising children, the high cost of housing and a lack of job protection for women being reasons to only have one child or have no children at all⁴⁰.
- 9.3.2 Following a continuing decline in birth rates⁴¹ (see [Birth rates](#)) and a shrinking workforce and increasing elderly population⁴² (see [Age structure](#)) the Chinese state announced on 31 May 2021 that they would be relaxing

³² Time, [China's One-Child Policy: How It Started in the First Place](#), 29 October 2015

³³ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.206), 27 December 2024

³⁴ LOC, [China: Statistics on Family Planning Fines Released](#), 4 August 2014

³⁵ Time, [China's One-Child Policy: How It Started in the First Place](#), 29 October 2015

³⁶ Times of India. [China 3 Child Policy: China approves three-child policy with ...](#), 20 August 2021

³⁷ ABC News, [This is how thousands of Chinese women defied the one-child ...](#), 15 February 2020

³⁸ ABC News, [This is how thousands of Chinese women defied the one-child ...](#), 15 February 2020

³⁹ LOC, [China: Two-Child Policy Becomes Law](#), 8 January 2016

⁴⁰ Times of India. [China 3 Child Policy: China approves three-child policy with ...](#), 20 August 2021

⁴¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.207), 27 December 2024

⁴² The Diplomat, [China Loosens Family Planning, Again](#), 2 June 2021

their 2 child policy to allow married couples to have 3 children. The policy was formally adopted into law on 20 August 2021 and was effective immediately^{43 44} .

- 9.3.3 The Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC), a group created by the US Congress to monitor human rights and the development of the rule of law in China⁴⁵, noted in their 2024 annual report that:

‘To address what senior PRC officials refer to as the “great challenge” of the aging population and the below-replacement birth rate, the Party Central Committee Political Bureau (Politburo) announced the adoption of a universal three-child policy in May 2021, allowing all married couples to have up to three children. Policy goals include increasing the birth rate, balancing the overall sex ratio, “optimizing” the population structure, raising “population quality,” and safeguarding the “rights and interests of women in employment.” The previous use of fines for exceeding birth limits was abolished.’⁴⁶

- 9.3.4 The US State Department (USSD) in their 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, published in April 2024 (USSD 2023 human rights report) noted: ‘The law restricted most married couples to three children (changed from two in 2021) and allowed couples to apply for permission to have a fourth child if they met local and provincial requirements. The law included provisions aimed at increasing the birth rate and “reducing the burden” of raising children.’⁴⁷

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9.4 Reaction to the 3-child policy

- 9.4.1 Human Rights Watch noted in their article ‘It’s time to abolish China’s three-child policy’ published on 22 February 2023 that:

‘Since 2016, the authorities moved swiftly from a one- to two- to three-child policy. These changes were buttressed with tax cuts, subsidies, cash rewards and other incentives, and laced with propaganda about the virtue and duty of having more children.

‘... When the government announced the three-child policy in June 2021, it was met with widespread cynicism online. “I’m not buying three Rolls-Royces not because there’s any restriction, but because they’re expensive,” a post on the Chinese social media platform Weibo read. “I want to sell my quota to rich people,” wrote another.

‘When the two-child policy was in effect – from 2016 to 2021 – a popular internet saying described the impossible position working women in China faced: “If you haven’t had children, employers regard you as an ‘extra-large time bomb’ that will explode twice [take maternity leave twice]. If you’ve had one child, you’re a ‘time bomb’ likely to have a second child at any time. If you already have two children, you must be too busy taking care of the children so [you] can’t focus on work”.

⁴³ BBC News, [China NPC: Three-child policy formally passed into law](#), 20 August 2021

⁴⁴ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.207), 27 December 2024

⁴⁵ CECC, [About](#), no date

⁴⁶ CECC, [2024 Annual Report](#), 16 December 2024

⁴⁷ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices \(section 6\)](#), 22 April 2024

'No wonder few women want a third child even now that they can. According to a 2022 online survey of professional women by the job search website Zhilian Zhaopin, only 0.8 per cent of respondents said they wanted to have three children.'⁴⁸

- 9.4.2 In a 2024 article in the International Communication Association, Ming Zhang, Chi Zhang and Yuxin Liu noted that:

'Ironically, the state-led, top-down three-children initiative sparked widespread discontent among Chinese women, who, after enduring four decades of restricted reproductive rights, were now being urged to reproduce for the country. Expressing their anger and critique on Weibo with hashtags like #CanShorteningEducationIncreaseFertilityRates and #IsItReally ImportantToHaveOffspring, they propelled these topics to trend for an entire day, reflecting a stark critique of the government's heteropatriarchal agenda.'⁴⁹

- 9.4.3 CNN reported in August 2024 that:

'In May, China's National Health Commission issued a dozen "birth-friendly theme posters" to local bureaus, calling for a "widespread dissemination" from social media to community parks. The move was met with wry comments online, referencing past one-child slogans like "Fewer kids, happier lives," and, "If you want to be rich, have fewer children and plant more trees." These chants are not just recounted for ridicule – people have found new resonance with the ruling Chinese Communist Party's old teachings and are now acting on them earnestly.'⁵⁰

- 9.4.4 Voice of America (VOA), a US international broadcaster, noted in an article from November 2024 that:

'... China had a stringent one-child policy for decades. That policy formally ended in 2016 when couples were allowed to have two children. However, the change in policy has done little to turn the trend around.

'In addition to financial challenges, Yi [Yi Fuxian, a demographer and expert on Chinese population trends at the University of Wisconsin-Madison] said China's persistently low birth rate is also the result of less willingness to have children and the growing prevalence of infertility among Chinese women, in part due to trying to have a child later in life, according to researchers.'⁵¹

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9.5 Government incentives to encourage more births

- 9.5.1 A October 2023 paper by academics Zhenwu Zhai and Guangzhao Jin of Renmin University of China, published in the Chinese Journal of Sociology titled 'China's family planning policy and fertility transition' noted that:

'In March 2022, the State Council issued the Notice Regarding the Special Additional Deduction of Individual Income Tax for the Care of Children Under Three Years of Age (State Council, 2022). It stipulates that starting 1 January 2022, taxpayers can deduct a fixed amount of 1000 *yuan* per month for each child under the age of three for whom they provide care-related

⁴⁸ HRW, [It's time to abolish China's three-child policy](#), 22 February 2023

⁴⁹ Ming Zhang et al, [From one-child policy to three-children initiative: a feminist critique of the...](#), 2024

⁵⁰ CNN, [China's one-child policy hangover: Scarred women dismiss Beijing's ...](#), 18 August 2024

⁵¹ VOA, [China attempts to boost birth rate amid mounting challenges](#), 4 November 2024

expenses.

‘... In October 2022, the report of the 20th National Congress of the CPC further emphasized the need to “establish a policy system to boost birth rates and reduce the costs of pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and schooling” (Xinhua, 2022). In May 2023, during the first meeting of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs under the 20th Central Committee, President Xi Jinping proposed the following: reforming education and health services; establishing a sound policy system to support childbearing; developing inclusive childcare services; reducing the burden on families of childbearing, child-rearing, and education; promoting a childbearing-friendly society; safeguarding long-term and balanced population development (Xinhua, 2023).’⁵²

9.5.2 CNN reported in August 2024 that:

‘Since the shift to a three-child policy in 2021, Beijing has been running national campaigns to foster a “pro-birth culture” as China’s population shrinks and grays at an alarming rate. Posters and slogans once warning of the perils of having more than one child have been replaced with ones encouraging more births.

‘...Local governments have rolled out a flurry of policy incentives, from cash handouts and real estate subsidies to the extension of maternity leave.

‘... Last month, the Communist Party proposed boosting incentives, including childbirth subsidies and more affordable childcare, at a key meeting of party leaders. Yet, debt-stricken local governments ... can only carry them out on a shoestring budget, dooming the party’s birth boost attempt, according to Yi. Chinese state-run media outlet Jiemian reported in early June that the highest childcare subsidies nationwide amount to only 57,800 yuan (about \$8,000) [£6,303⁵³] – a drop in the bucket for one of the world’s priciest countries to raise kids. The cost of raising a child to age 18 in China is 6.3 times its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita - second only to its neighbor South Korea at 7.79 times, according to a YuWa report.’⁵⁴

9.5.3 Investopedia, a global financial media website⁵⁵, in relation to whether China was encouraging the birth rate, noted in an article from September 2024 that:

‘China has implemented or increased parental tax deductions, family leave, housing subsidies for families, and spending on reproductive health and childcare services to increase the national birth rate since ending the policy. The Chinese government also promotes flexible work hours and work-from-home options for parents. Most interesting are policies one wouldn’t consider to be related to the birth rate at first glance. They include banning private tutoring companies from profiting off teaching core subjects during weekends or holidays. China is attempting to reduce the burdens of parenting by lowering educational pressure on children and this often costly financial load on parents.’⁵⁶

⁵² Zhenwu Zhai, Guangzhao Jin, [China's family planning policy and fertility](#), 11 October 2023

⁵³ Xe.com, [57,800 CNY to GBP](#), 18 February 2025

⁵⁴ CNN World, [China's one-child policy hangover: Scarred women dismiss](#), 18 August 2024

⁵⁵ Investopedia, [About Us](#), no date

⁵⁶ Investopedia, [What Was China's One-Child Policy? Its Implications and....](#), 3 September 2024

9.5.4 The CECC 2024 annual report noted:

'Party leaders repeatedly emphasized the importance of population growth through official speeches and events, particularly focusing on women and their role in childbearing. At the 13th National Women's Congress in October 2023 held in Beijing municipality, Party General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of childbearing and family culture, and Ding Xuexiang, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee—China's paramount policy and decision making body led by Xi—declared that women should "establish a correct outlook on marriage and love, childbirth and family." Ding and Huang Xiaowei, Party Secretary of the All-China Women's Federation, both briefly mentioned "equality between men and women," yet gender equality received negligible attention at the Women's Congress compared to the focus on family and childbearing, and on Xi Jinping's ideological discourse.

'... Pro-natal propaganda messages were disseminated this past year, including via popular culture channels, public art, text messaging, and phone calls. Public service advertisements aired during ChinaCentral Television's 2024 Annual Spring Festival Gala featured "a house full of children" and images of multigenerational bliss. Local governments modified public artwork and removed outdated slogans to attempt to erase the legacy of one-child policy birth restrictions and instead promote having more children. In August 2023, coinciding with the Qixi Festival, known as "China's Valentines Day," authorities in Xi'an municipality, Shaanxi province reportedly sent texts to residents wishing them "sweet love, marriage and childbirth" and "good fertility." A mother of two from Quanjiao county, Chuzhou municipality, Anhui province, reported receiving calls from community officials encouraging her to have a third child. In late 2023, a public sculpture near the waterfront in Wuhan municipality, Hubei province, was altered to show a couple with three children, which previously displayed a couple with only one child. The National Radio and Television Administration, which is subordinate to the Party's Central Propaganda Department, announced a review of dramas, planning to remove unapproved titles and shows that portray lifestyle choices deviating from the Party's messaging about family values.'⁵⁷

9.5.5 The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in their 2024 Country Information Report, based on their 'knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Australia and overseas, and taking into account open-source reports' (DFAT 2024 report) noted that: 'In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that local governments across China now provided various financial incentives to encourage couples to have more children. For example, maternity benefits and subsidies covering childbirth-related medical expenses were offered in Shanghai, while health insurance schemes were offering couples reimbursements for IVF treatments in Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province.'⁵⁸

9.5.6 VOA noted in November 2024 that:

'To boost the country's declining birth rate, China's State Council, the country's chief administrative authority, rolled out a policy with 13

⁵⁷ CECC, [2024 Annual Report](#), 16 December 2024

⁵⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.206), 27 December 2024

directives aimed at enhancing “childbirth support services, expand childcare systems, strengthen support in education, housing, and employment, and foster a birth-friendly social atmosphere.” The new measures also include providing maternity insurance to rural migrant workers and people with flexible employment, as long as they have basic health insurance. The policy document also urges local authorities to implement parental leave. Other measures include offering subsidies and medical resources for children and the call on local governments to budget for childcare centers and preferential taxes or fees for these services. Local authorities are also encouraged “to raise the limits of” housing loans to help families with multiple children buy homes. Despite the Chinese government’s efforts, analysts say these new measures may only have a limited impact on boosting China’s birth rate. “China is currently facing a serious debt crisis, many local governments, especially those in northeastern or western provinces, won’t have enough financial resources to implement the policy directives that the state council has laid out,” Yi Fuxian, a demographer and expert on Chinese population trends at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, told VOA by phone.⁵⁹

9.5.7 CNN noted in a November 2024 article that:

‘To reverse the decline, Chinese officials have rolled out a raft of measures, from financial incentives to propaganda campaigns, to nudge young people to tie the knot and have children. Officials have organized blind dating events, mass weddings, and attempted to curtail the tradition of large “bride price” payments from the groom to his future wife’s family that put marriage out of reach for many poor men in rural areas. Since 2022, China’s Family Planning Association has launched pilot programs to create a “new-era marriage and childbearing culture,” enrolling dozens of cities to promote the “social value of childbearing” and encouraging young people to get married and give birth at an “appropriate age.” But so far, these policies have failed to convince Chinese young adults who are grappling with high unemployment, the rising cost of living and a lack of more robust social welfare support amid the economic slowdown.’⁶⁰

9.5.8 Population Matters noted in an article in February 2025 that:

‘In a speech in 2023 to the All-China Women’s Federation, President Xi Jinping called for the organisation to “actively cultivate a new marriage and childbirth culture, strengthen guidance of young people’s views on marriage, parenthood and family, as well as promote policies to support childbirth”.

‘The Chinese government has since introduced a range of policies to tackle the low birth rate including tax benefits, cheaper housing, and cash incentives to encourage people to have more children.

‘In 2021, central Chinese Communist Party authorities set out a comprehensive nationwide pro-natalist policy framework. Local authorities have since followed suit with the launch of pilot projects aimed at building a “marriage and childbearing culture for a new era” in dozens of Chinese cities led by the China Family Planning Association.

‘Jingzhou, in Hubei province, is one of the latest cities to offer cash subsidies to families with multiple children, providing 6,000 yuan for a second child and

⁵⁹ VOA, [China attempts to boost birth rate amid mounting challenges](#), 4 November 2024

⁶⁰ CNN, [China on track to record its lowest number of new marriages, official ...](#), 4 November 2024

12,000 yuan for a third.’⁶¹

9.5.9 The CECC 2024 annual report, citing various sources, noted:

‘Implementation measures reported this past year reflect haphazard efforts to promote marriage and childbirth, including the following:

- Local governments. Authorities continued to offer financial incentives to boost birth rates and encourage marriage in response to the falling marriage rate and the drop in population, including subsidies for couples who get married at a younger age, for the birth of a second or third child, and to support maternity fees. Examples of local government incentive plans include: Changshan county, Quzhou municipality, Zhejiang province announced rewards of 1,000 yuan (US\$137) [£109⁶²] to couples if the woman is 25 or younger to “promote age-appropriate marriage and childbearing.” Hangzhou municipality, Zhejiang province, announced a plan to provide couples bearing a second child a one-time subsidy of up to 7,000 yuan (US\$960) [£763⁶³] and 25,000 yuan (US\$3,500) [£2,726⁶⁴] to those with a third child both for maternity and childcare fees. While officials in Zhengzhou municipality, Henan province, promised subsidies for the birth of a third child and offered extended parental leave, reports emerged in November 2023 that officials had rejected subsidy applications. Zhengzhou officials accounted for the delay by explaining that they did not yet have implementation details, but the municipality’s serious financial debt likely was a factor in the rejections, according to Bloomberg.
- ‘Military. The central government also involved the military in the pro-natal agenda with the release on September 7, 2023, of “implementing measures for military personnel” of the PRC Population and Family Planning Law. According to Xinhua, the PRC government’s news agency, the 33 provisions contained in the implementing measures provide financial incentives, family planning, parental leave, and other forms of support to encourage childbearing and improve military effectiveness.
- ‘... Legislative proposals and suggestions raised at the annual March 2024 meetings of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference were similar to previous proposals made since the pro-natal population policy was launched in 2021. In an address to the CPPCC, the ACWF’s delegate spoke approvingly of the population policy and regulatory framework but pointed out gaps in implementation, such as difficulties accessing affordable childcare and employment discrimination against women.” Another proposal also focused on women in the workplace, suggesting improvements to litigation channels for women who had been fired or subjected to unfair work conditions because of their pregnancy, childbirth, or needs related to lactation...’⁶⁵

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⁶¹ Population Matters, [China's Reproductive Rights: Calls for a Childbirth Culture](#), 6 February 2025

⁶² Xe.com, [1,000 CNY to GBP](#), 25 February 2025

⁶³ Xe.com, [7,000 CNY to GBP](#), 25 February 2025

⁶⁴ Xe.com, [25,000 CNY to GBP](#), 25 February 2025

⁶⁵ CECC, [2024 Annual Report](#), 16 December 2024

9.6 Enforcement of the family planning policy (including fee penalties)

9.6.1 Under the one and two child policies, families could be fined a social maintenance fee for children born in excess of the family planning policy. The amended law issued in 2021 abolished the social maintenance fee^{66 67 68}.

9.6.2 The US State Department (USSD) in their 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, published in April 2024 noted that:

‘Through law and policy, the CCP and government limited the rights of parents to choose the number of children they have. The law restricted most married couples to three children (changed from two in 2021) and allowed couples to apply for permission to have a fourth child if they met local and provincial requirements. The law included provisions aimed at increasing the birth rate and “reducing the burden” of raising children.

‘Enforcement of the decades-old population-control policy, which originally limited parents to one child, relied on social pressure, education, propaganda, and economic penalties, as well as on measures such as mandatory pregnancy examinations, forced contraception, forced sterilizations, and coerced abortions. Penalties for exceeding the permitted number of children were not enforced uniformly and varied by province. The law as implemented required each woman with an unauthorized pregnancy to abort or to pay a social compensation fee, which could reach 10 times a person’s annual disposable income. Those with the financial means often paid the fee to ensure their children born in violation of the birth restrictions would have access to a wide array of government-provided social services and rights. Some avoided the fee by hiding such children with friends or relatives.

‘... Non-Han Chinese parents judged to have exceeded the government limit on the number of children risked being sent to detention centers unless they paid exorbitant fines.

‘The country’s national family planning laws started to relax restrictions on reproductive rights, but local implementation remained inconsistent...’⁶⁹ Previous years of the USSD report (2022 and 2021) state that as the law only applied to the rights of married couples local implementation was inconsistent^{70 71}.

9.6.3 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

‘The likelihood of enforcing penalties for non-compliance with family planning policies was low in 2023, including for fines incurred before new rules were implemented. Fujian, for example, no longer enforced its family planning policy strictly or imposed any penalties. While some state-owned enterprises had dismissed employees in the past for breaching child limits, in-country sources reported that enforcement was a low priority for the government in 2022. As at the time of publication, DFAT was not aware of people being

⁶⁶ LOC, [Three-Child Policy Becomes Law, Social Maintenance Fee Abolished](#), 23 September 2021

⁶⁷ Bird & Bird, [China Frontline August 2021: Three-Child Policy](#), 31 August 2021

⁶⁸ CECC, [2024 Annual Report](#), 16 December 2024

⁶⁹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

⁷⁰ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 20 March 2023

⁷¹ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 April 2022

imprisoned for failure to pay fees since at least 2019 or any recent examples of forced abortions, with the exception of certain targeted ethnic minority populations ...

‘As at the time of publication, DFAT was not aware of instances where breaching family planning laws was severely punished anywhere in China following 2021 changes to family planning policy. In rare cases, outstanding social compensation fees for previous children may still need to be paid because grandfathering policies were not uniformly enforced across China. More detailed information around how grandfathered or historical social compensation fees are calculated is limited, considering the relatively low number of recorded instances. National laws do not set out a fee schedule that applies to all localities, but the Fujian Family Planning Office told DFAT in 2018 that social compensation fees were set at the prior year’s average annual disposable income at county level, or 200 to 300 per cent of the individual’s prior yearly salary (disposable income), whichever was greater.’⁷²

- 9.6.4 A diplomatic source in an email dated 15 April 2025 noted that they were not aware of any cases where fees were applied to those who have had children in excess of policy⁷³.

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9.7 Abortion, sterilisation and birth control

- 9.7.1 Diplomatic sources were asked if they were aware of any forced sterilisations or abortions taking place outside of Xinjiang in recent years. In emails dated 16 March 2022⁷⁴ and 15 April 2025⁷⁵ they stated that they were not aware of any forced sterilisations or abortions taking place in recent years. There was no information in the other sources consulted regarding forced sterilisations or abortions taking place outside of Xinjiang in recent years (see [Bibliography](#)).

- 9.7.2 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted:

‘Ethnic and religious minority women, particularly Uyghurs, continued to be often subjected to coercive population control measures not applied to the ethnic Han Chinese population. Government targeting of ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang with intensified coercive population control measures resulted in plummeting birth rates since 2018. There were widespread reports of coercive population control measures, including forced abortions, forced sterilizations, involuntary IUD insertions, and pregnancy checks, occurring at detention centers in the region and targeting minority groups, primarily Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs...’⁷⁶

- 9.7.3 See also the Country Policy and Information Note on [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#).

- 9.7.4 Population Matters reported in February 2025 that:

‘Whilst positive incentives have so far done little to reverse the trend of

⁷² DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.211- 3.212), 27 December 2024

⁷³ Diplomatic source email, [Annex B: Diplomatic source](#), 15 April 2025

⁷⁴ Diplomatic source email, [Annex A: Diplomatic source](#), 16 March 2022

⁷⁵ Diplomatic source email, [Annex B: Diplomatic source](#), 15 April 2025

⁷⁶ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

China's consistently low birth rate, other more coercive measures have been introduced including further restrictions on women's reproductive rights and access to abortions:

- 'In 2018, Jiangxi province in eastern China introduced a policy that anyone seeking to terminate a pregnancy after 14 weeks of gestation must prove that the procedure is medically necessary and obtain signatures from three doctors.
- 'In August 2022, the National Health Commission's (NHC) new birth-encouraging plan included a directive to "reduce abortions that are not medically necessary."
- 'In November 2022, China's National Medical Products Administration banned online sales of two abortion pills.
- 'In February 2023, a court in Chengdu city ruled that termination of pregnancy without spousal consent or "legitimate reasons" constitutes a violation of men's right to reproduction. The case eroded existing precedents and restricted the grounds on which many women could access abortion, and in effect denied the autonomy of married women to make decisions about their own medical procedures.'⁷⁷

9.7.5 There was no information in the sources consulted regarding the implementation of family planning laws in hukou areas leading to forced sterilisations or abortions (see [Bibliography](#)).

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9.8 Registration of children born in contravention of the previous family planning policies

9.8.1 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

'Children born in violation of the former "two-child" or "one-child" policies, known as heihazi (black children), have been eligible to apply for hukou since 2015. These children, who were born out of plan (or their parents), are able to approach authorities in China or at embassies overseas to retroactively register births.

'... President Xi announced in 2015 that China had begun providing household registration for the nearly 13 million unregistered children born 'out of plan,' irrespective of the family planning and birth limits in place at the time. International academics told DFAT in 2023 that the registration of children who were born out of plan between 1980 and 2016 was still a 'grey area' and social compensation fees for those children still existed in theory, but the collection of these fines was rarely enforced in practice. Children who were born 'out of plan' (or their parents) were now able to approach authorities to retroactively register births. However, in country sources told DFAT in 2023 that sometimes there may not be strong motivation for police to update records and add out of plan children to a hukou; this reflects individual attitudes rather than official policy. Out of plan children who were not registered were ineligible to obtain travel documents, meaning they would be unlikely to be found outside of China or in asylum seeker caseloads unless they were born overseas or had left China via informal

⁷⁷ Population Matters, [China's Reproductive Rights: Calls for a Childbirth Culture](#), 6 February 2025

channels.’⁷⁸

9.8.2 The Perspective⁷⁹, a joint media outlet, noted in their article from February 2025 that:

‘The one-child policy, which reigned in the country for more than 30 years, has also resulted in the development of an entire generation of children—who are now also adults—that do not appear in Chinese state records. People who fall into this group are popularly called “Heihaizi”, China’s “black children” who could not obtain a hukou—an official household registration.

‘...the amount of Heihaizi is thought to number more than ten million.

‘For the millions of Heihaizi, this administrative hole causes devastating consequences. They can’t access regular public services such as healthcare, get legally married, or even use public transportation. Moreover, they can’t go to school and get a formal education as normal citizens, and when they become adults, they can’t legally get a job.

‘Even in the case that families would want to regularize their Heihaizi’s administrative status and obtain a hukou registration, the cost to do so is often too prohibitive for them.

‘Moreover, despite the promises of the Chinese Communist Party, a great number of people have not yet been able to obtain official registration. The fines to be paid by Heihaizi and their families are still very high, and acquiring the documents necessary for a life in the open still seems to be a utopia for many.’⁸⁰

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9.9 Children born overseas

9.9.1 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

‘Children born in China or overseas to unmarried parents were automatically linked to or inherit their mother’s hukou ...

‘... The Government of China regards all children born to a Chinese citizen parent as Chinese citizens, regardless of the country where the child was physically born (Jus sanguinis or citizenship by descent). These children are linked to or inherit their parents’ hukou registration and can obtain travel documents from China’s embassies overseas... Individuals born to non-Chinese citizen parents do not inherit hukou. Foreigners or non-Chinese citizens are not eligible for hukou and cannot be added to a spouse’s or their family’s hukou.

‘The Government of China can legally cancel hukou registration when an individual has been abroad for more than a year, if they have not applied for specific approval. In practice, cancelation rarely occurs due to a lack of coordination between local police and border officials. The vast majority of China’s citizens residing overseas, even for extended periods of time, still have their hukou intact.’⁸¹

⁷⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 2.28 & 3.210), 27 December 2024

⁷⁹ The Perspective, [About](#), no date

⁸⁰ The Perspective, [Unrecognised Children in China’s Post One-Child Policy...](#), 18 February 2025

⁸¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 2.26-2.27), 27 December 2024

9.10 Child gender selection

9.10.1 In its 2023 policy recommendations on China's response to gender-biased sex selection and son preference, UNFPA⁸² highlighted that:

'China presently grapples with the coexistence of fetal sex selection and postnatal favoritism towards son. However, the former poses a more severe and far-reaching challenge. China has maintained an abnormally skewed [sex ratio at birth] SRB for the longest period globally, exceeding normal range since the 1980s. For more than ten years at the beginning of the 21st century, China consistently recorded the highest SRB globally. After a decline post-2009, the ratio has experienced slight fluctuations, reaching 111.3 in 2020 and slightly decreasing further in 2021, only to rise again to 111.1 in 2022.

'The primary driver behind China's skewed SRB is fetal sex selection. The number of unborn female infants terminated through induced abortions is huge. It is estimated that the cumulative total from 1970 to 2020 reached 25.68 million (Chao, 2021). Although postnatal favoritism towards son still persists, it is gradually diminishing with economic development and social progress.

'Research indicates that parents do not significantly favor son over daughter in terms of health and education investments during their children's growth stages. Even in families with both son and daughter, parents show no difference in extracurricular educational investments between son and daughter (Liu Wen, Yu Jia, Xie Yu, 2021). However, the study also shows that the allocation of educational resources in agricultural households is still significantly biased towards boys. Moreover, the son preference tradition, deeply rooted in history, remains a prevailing mindset and behavioral trait that is challenging to entirely eradicate at present.'⁸³

9.10.2 The CECC 2024 annual report noted:

'The legacy of the one-child policy continues to have an impact on Chinese society and beyond. In January 2024, the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS) reported that in 2023, there were 30.97 million more males than females in China (720.32 million males to 689.35 million females), with a sex ratio (total population) of 104.49 males to 100 females. The population control policy, moreover, continues to influence the use of sex selection based on the traditional cultural preference for sons. Data published this past year show lopsided sex ratios favoring boys following the introduction of the two- and three-child policies. According to that data (from 2020), boy-preference is seen in couples having a third child, with 132.93 boys born for every 100 girls on average across China. Observers have linked the trafficking of women within China and from abroad into China for purposes of forced marriage and commercial sexual exploitation, to the lopsided sex-ratio imbalance, as well as to an attempt to drive "bride prices" lower as grooms and their families attempt to find potential spouses.'⁸⁴

⁸² UNFPA, [About](#), no date

⁸³ UNFPA, [Policy Recommendations on China's Response to...](#), 15 November 2024

⁸⁴ CECC, [2024 Annual Report](#), 16 December 2024

9.11 Discrimination

9.11.1 A 2024 article published in Humanities and Social Sciences Communications⁸⁵ noted that:

‘Existing research has demonstrated that women face greater obstacles in career development compared to men. Women often need to exert more effort than men under similar circumstances to access equal employment and advancement opportunities, which is consistent with established research findings (Olsen and LaGree, 2023; Yang et al., 2024). This underscores the pervasive presence of occupational bias as a manifestation of gender discrimination in contemporary society. Addressing occupational bias remains crucial for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment. However, this study diverges from prior research by highlighting the negative spillover effects of the three-child policy on the employment prospects of women of childbearing age. These women face heightened employment discrimination, particularly pronounced in lower-skilled job roles. The potential for childbearing among women of childbearing age instills apprehension in enterprises when hiring female employees. Concerns regarding career interruptions due to childbirth and escalating welfare expenses lead companies to exhibit a preference for male employees or women who are currently not considering parenthood. The absence of supportive fertility policies further compounds enterprises’ reluctance to hire female workers, placing many women in a predicament where they feel hesitant to have children even if they desire children. Additionally, for female employees in low-skilled, homogenized job roles, the simplicity and substitutability of their tasks, as well as the low cost for enterprises to dismiss such employees, accentuate this bias in employment practices.’⁸⁶

9.11.2 CNN reported in July 2024 that:

‘More than a dozen Chinese companies face legal action for allegedly asking job applicants to take pregnancy tests, state media has reported. Prosecutors found that 168 women seeking positions at 16 companies in Nantong, a city in the eastern province of Jiangsu, had been tested illegally as part of their pre-employment physical check, the state-run Procuratorial Daily reported on Monday.

‘The case highlights a contradiction at the heart of the Chinese economy: While the country is trying to boost record-low birth rates, some companies are reluctant to hire pregnant workers. Employers have reportedly avoided recruiting women of childbearing age — with reports of women being asked about family planning during job interviews, or being passed over for roles even if they don’t plan to have children. Chinese law bans employers from administering pregnancy tests or discriminating against pregnant workers.

‘... The report didn’t name any of the companies nor specify whether any of them had been fined. According to Chinese law, companies can be fined up to 50,000 yuan (\$6,900) [£5,406⁸⁷] for gender discrimination.

⁸⁵ Humanities & Social Sciences Communications, [Journal information](#), no date

⁸⁶ Humanities & Social Sciences Communications, [Effects of the three-child policy...](#), 29 April 2024

⁸⁷ XE.com, [50,000 CNY to GBP](#), 4 March 2025

‘... Women taking maternity leave may face “unfair treatment” at work such as being transferred to other teams, taking a pay cut, or missing out on promotion opportunities, the report said.’⁸⁸

9.11.3 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

‘An amendment to the Women’s Rights and Interests Protection Law (1992) came into effect in January 2023 to clarify basic legal rules prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace and establishing protections against gender-based discrimination. The updated Women’s Rights and Interests Protection Law (1992) explicitly bans employers from not promoting women solely on the basis of marital and/or pregnancy status. The amendment also responds to gender discrimination in the workplace in China. For example, local media in 2021 highlighted job advertisements explicitly seeking men candidates. ... International academics reported that women’s decisions to get married and start families often adversely impact their job prospects.

‘... In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that having children born out of plan was generally no longer a cause of social embarrassment or stigma.’⁸⁹

9.11.4 A 2025 article published in Labour Economics, a journal ‘devoted to publishing international research on empirical, theoretical and econometric topics that are of particular interest to labour economists’,⁹⁰ noted that:

‘We conducted a correspondence study and submitted 18,728 resumes to 4,682 entry-level job postings on a prominent online job board, with randomized applicant gender, marital, and parental status. Our results show that single female applicants are more likely to receive callbacks than married females, who have a higher probability of childbearing. Conversely, male applicants do not experience a similar gap based on their marital or parental status. A complementary survey of 745 hiring managers aligns with these results, with a pronounced disfavor towards married women without children, largely due to their preference for parental status and concerns about maternity leave. The survey further suggests that hiring preferences may be influenced by the managers’ own demographic and personal traits, such as gender, parental status, and time and risk preferences.’⁹¹

9.11.5 NBC News noted in their article from 2025 that:

‘Requiring job applicants to declare their marital and childbearing status has long been seen as a way for Chinese employers to avoid hiring women who plan to get married or have children in the near future.

‘As much as some employers would prefer their female workers to remain single, women are getting the opposite instructions from the Chinese government, which has been pressuring them to get married and have children to help address the declining and fast-aging population. Women are being encouraged to embrace more “traditional” roles in society as wives and mothers, and Chinese leader Xi Jinping has personally called on women to promote a “childbearing culture.”

‘Last month, a company in China rolled back a policy that threatened never-married and divorced employees with termination if they were still single by

⁸⁸ CNN, [China probes companies for allegedly giving pregnancy tests to job seekers](#), 17 July 2024

⁸⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.192 & 3.208), 27 December 2024

⁹⁰ Labour Economics, [About the journal](#), no date

⁹¹ Labour Economics, [Fertility discrimination in the Chinese labor market...](#), January 2025

the end of September following public uproar. The company's notice had criticized single employees for "not responding to the national call." Despite women making strides in the workplace, achieving gender equality has been an uphill battle in China.

'A third of women in the country still take less than the 98 days of maternity leave they are entitled to, according to a survey last year by the Women's Studies Institute of China.'⁹²

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10. Single and unmarried mothers

10.1 Family planning policy in relation to unmarried women

- 10.1.1 Sixth Tone, a team of writers, editors and researchers covering news from China⁹³, noted in an article from September 2021 that: 'Previous revisions of national family planning policy have all stipulated that the right to start a family belongs to "a husband and wife." Although some scholars argue that, under China's Civil Code, "everything which is not explicitly forbidden is allowed," in reality, many provinces and municipalities regard out-of-wedlock childbirth as a violation of the family planning policy.'⁹⁴
- 10.1.2 The Economist noted in December 2021 that: 'China does not explicitly ban extramarital births. Its marriage law guarantees the same rights for children born out of wedlock as those born in it. Yet the family-planning law says that procreation involves "a husband and wife". Local officials often take that to mean that unwed mothers are in violation of that legislation.'⁹⁵
- 10.1.3 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted: 'The law only mentioned the rights of married couples, which meant unmarried women were not authorized to have children.'⁹⁶ Previous years of the USSD report (2022, 2021 and 2020) state that unmarried women were not authorized to have children^{97 98 99}.
- 10.1.4 The 2024 DFAT report observed that the '... national reproduction policies never explicitly banned unmarried women from having children...' ¹⁰⁰
- 10.1.5 There was no further information in the sources consulted whether the legal situation for unmarried women has changed since the change to the family planning law in 2021 (see [Bibliography](#)).

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10.2 Social compensation fees

- 10.2.1 Sixth Tone noted in an article from September 2021, published shortly after the 3-child policy was established that: 'Single mothers and their children have long been subject to various degrees of punishment; for example, many of them encounter difficulties in obtaining the proper hukou household

⁹² NBC News, [Want to get married or have kids? Companies hiring....](#), 13 March 2025

⁹³ Sixth Tone, [About us](#), no date

⁹⁴ Sixth Tone, [China Wants Larger Families. Unless You're a Single Mom](#), 1 September 2021

⁹⁵ The Economist, [Single mums in China want the same treatment as married...](#), 4 December 2021

⁹⁶ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

⁹⁷ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 20 March 2023

⁹⁸ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 April 2022

⁹⁹ USSD, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 30 March 2021

¹⁰⁰ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.209), 27 December 2024

registration, which is required to enroll in school. Local governments that have taken tentative steps toward supporting out-of-wedlock childbirth often find themselves the target of public criticism.¹⁰¹

- 10.2.2 The Economist noted in December 2021 that: ‘Local governments are encouraging procreation with new support that includes longer parental leave and fatter subsidies. Divorced or widowed mothers can claim these benefits, but those who have never married, including lesbians whose unions are not recognised in China, usually cannot.’¹⁰²
- 10.2.3 The New York Times noted in an article from July 2022 that: ‘The authorities moved last year [2021] to scrap the use of “social support” fees — a sort of penalty — that single mothers pay to get benefits for their children. But some areas have been slow to adopt the new rules, and the regulations can vary because enforcement is left to the discretion of local governments.’¹⁰³
- 10.2.4 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted that unmarried mothers ‘... had social compensation fees imposed on them, if they gave birth “outside of the [family planning] policy”.’¹⁰⁴ Previous years of the USSD report (2022 and 2021) state that social compensation fees were imposed on unmarried mothers^{105 106}. The 2020 report refers to unmarried women having enormous social maintenance fees imposed on them¹⁰⁷.

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10.3 Access to services

- 10.3.1 The New York Times noted in an article from July 2022 that: ‘Babies born to single parents in China have long struggled to receive social benefits like medical insurance and education. Women who are single and pregnant are regularly denied access to public health care and insurance that covers maternity leave. They are not legally protected if employers fire them for being pregnant.’¹⁰⁸
- 10.3.2 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted: ‘... unmarried persons were often discriminated against legally. Unmarried pregnant women continued to face difficulty accessing prenatal care at public hospitals and obtaining insurance coverage for prenatal care.’¹⁰⁹
- 10.3.3 The same source went on to note that unmarried mothers ‘... could be subjected to the denial of legal documents such as birth documents and the hukou residence permit, although local governments rarely enforced these regulations.’¹¹⁰ Previous years of the USSD report (2022 and 2021) also stated unmarried mothers could be subject to the denial of legal documents such as birth and hukou permits^{111 112}. The 2020 report stated that

¹⁰¹ Sixth Tone, [China Wants Larger Families. Unless You're a Single Mom](#), 1 September 2021

¹⁰² The Economist, [Single mums in China want the same treatment as married...](#), 4 December 2021

¹⁰³ The New York Times, [China Offers Women Perks for Having Babies, if They're...](#), 6 July 2022

¹⁰⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

¹⁰⁵ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 20 March 2023

¹⁰⁶ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 April 2022

¹⁰⁷ USSD, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 30 March 2021

¹⁰⁸ The New York Times, [China Offers Women Perks for Having Babies, if They're...](#), 6 July 2022

¹⁰⁹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

¹¹⁰ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

¹¹¹ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 20 March 2023

¹¹² USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 April 2022

unmarried women were subject to denial of legal documents¹¹³.

- 10.3.4 The 2024 DFAT report stated that although unmarried women were not banned from having children, ‘... proof of marriage was often requested from parents to be able to access free services including prenatal healthcare, a “mother’s salary” during maternity leave, and ensure job protection.’¹¹⁴

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10.4 Changes in policies

- 10.4.1 The New York Times noted in an article from July 2022 that:

‘A politician at China’s most recent annual meeting of its rubber-stamp legislature suggested that the party be more tolerant toward single women who wanted children, giving them the same rights as married couples. Yet even as a shrinking population threatens Beijing’s long-term economic ambitions, the Chinese authorities have often failed to introduce lasting policy changes.

‘... Last year, landlocked Hunan Province said it would consider providing fertility services for single women, but it has not made much progress. When Shanghai decided to drop its policy of giving maternity benefits only to married women, it reversed the decision just a few weeks later, underlining just how hard it is for the authorities to loosen their grip on family planning.’¹¹⁵

- 10.4.2 Shine News, a website giving readers breaking news, opinion and analysis about Shanghai and China powered by Shanghai Daily¹¹⁶, noted in an article from August 2022 that:

‘A healthcare security official issued a statement on maternity benefits for unmarried mothers this week. It quickly attracted tens of millions of viewers on Weibo [a Chinese blogging platform] within a day. The statement and reaction underscore two trends: the government’s drive to increase the birth rate in an aging society and the crusade by women’s rights groups to liberalize the treatment of single women.

“Unmarried mothers don’t need to submit a marriage certificate to claim a maternity allowance,” said Liu Juan, an official with the National Healthcare Security Administration [NHSA, an agency directly under the State Council at the vice-ministerial level¹¹⁷]. Liu told a news briefing on Wednesday. At the briefing, national health commission officials explained different aspects of a new guideline that supports government policies to create a “fertility-friendly society” as the nation tackles a growing population imbalance. Making maternity benefits more inclusive is one such policy under the new guideline.’¹¹⁸

- 10.4.3 Sixth Tone noted in an article from November 2022 that:

‘A city in southern China has announced a landmark policy to provide childbirth subsidies to unmarried mothers, as several places relax birth

¹¹³ USSD, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 30 March 2021

¹¹⁴ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.209), 27 December 2024

¹¹⁵ The New York Times, [China Offers Women Perks for Having Babies, if They’re...](#) , 6 July 2022

¹¹⁶ Shine News, [About Us](#), no date

¹¹⁷ NHSA, [Institutional Settings](#), no date

¹¹⁸ Shine News, [You’re single and pregnant? Now you can claim maternity benefits](#), 19 August 2022

policies to accelerate the country's free-falling birth rate.

'Health officials in Hechi, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, said they have excluded the marital status of women when applying for maternity insurance, domestic media outlet Jiemian reported Monday. The city's reimbursement policy also scrapped restrictions on couples from having a certain number of children, thereby encouraging them to have a fourth or fifth child.'¹¹⁹

10.4.4 The Guardian reported in January 2023 that:

'A Chinese province of more than 80 million people will lift restrictions on unmarried people having children and remove caps on the number of babies as part of a national drive to increase the country's birth rate. Sichuan's health commission announced on Monday it would allow all people to register births with the provincial government from 15 February. It will also remove limits on the number of birth registrations for any parent.

'Until now, the commission had allowed only married couples who wanted to have up to two children to register with local authorities. In a government notice, Sichuan authorities said the measures "shift the focus of childbearing registration to childbearing desire and childbearing results". The measures will be in place for five years.'¹²⁰

10.4.5 Reuters noted in 2023 that: 'In recent months, some provinces have extended childbirth benefits for unmarried women...'¹²¹

10.4.6 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada's Research Directorate's information response dated September 2023 (IRBC response September 2023) based on a range of sources noted: 'In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a postdoctoral fellow at Lingnan University in Hong Kong noted that although there is no national policy removing marriage as a requirement for birth registration, it has been removed by some local policies; the same source stated that in January 2016, the State Council issued a policy allowing children born outside of wedlock to receive a hukou residence permit (Postdoctoral Fellow 2023-09-11).'¹²²

10.4.7 The 2024 DFAT report stated: 'In 2023, there were an increasing number of international and local media reports detailing provinces efforts to abolish the unofficial marriage requirement [to have children]. Provinces like Sichuan went a step further in 2023 by removing all limits on the number of birth registrations for any parent.'¹²³

10.4.8 A diplomatic source in an e-mail dated 15 April 2025 noted that the: '...situation for single mothers is largely unchanged [since 2022]. There have been some local level initiatives to offer them more similar benefits to married couples but nothing at national level so coverage is inconsistent.'¹²⁴

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10.5 Abortion, birth control and assisted reproductive technologies

¹¹⁹ Sixth Tone, [Chinese City Announces Maternity Insurance for Unmarried...](#), 22 November 2022

¹²⁰ The Guardian, [Chinese province ends ban on unmarried people having children](#), 30 January 2023

¹²¹ Reuters, [Chinese woman fighting for fertility rights hopes to end single mother...](#), 11 May 2023

¹²² IRB of Canada, [Responses to Information Requests](#), 21 September 2023

¹²³ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.209), 27 December 2024

¹²⁴ Diplomatic source email, [Annex B: Diplomatic source](#), 15 April 2025

- 10.5.1 South China Morning Post (SCMP) noted in February 2022 that:
 ‘China’s family planning agency says it will “intervene” when unmarried women and teenagers seek abortions and promote traditional values to encourage people to have more children, as it tries to reverse declining birth rates. In a plan outlining key initiatives for the year, the China Family Planning Association said the intervention to reduce the number of abortions was to “improve reproductive health”. It said a task force would be set up for education and communication projects in this area, but no further details were given.’¹²⁵
- 10.5.2 Reuters noted in 2023 that ‘After China reported its first population drop in six decades amid record low birth and marriage rates, government political advisers proposed in March that single and unmarried women should have access to egg freezing and IVF treatment ... and in the southwestern province of Sichuan province single women are increasingly undergoing IVF treatments in private clinics.’¹²⁶
- 10.5.3 ABC News, part of American Broadcasting Company an US television network¹²⁷, noted in June 2023 that: ‘In China, unmarried women are banned from accessing assisted reproductive technologies (ART), including egg-freezing. The services are only available to heterosexual married couples. In March [2023], government advisers proposed that unmarried women should be allowed to access ART, as concerns grow over China’s declining population. But there have been no indications Beijing will make that change.’¹²⁸
- 10.5.4 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted: ‘Media reported in vitro fertilization was illegal for single women almost everywhere in the country.’¹²⁹
- 10.5.5 The Guardian, in a 2024 article, reported on the lack of access to egg-freezing services for single women in China, highlighting they are compelled to travel abroad to undergo the procedure. The article featured the story of a woman named Yang Li, stating that:
 ‘...The problem was, as a single woman in China, no fertility clinic would help her. Despite China’s push to boost the birthrate, only married couples with fertility problems can use egg-freezing services or any kind of assisted reproductive technologies. “I talked to a doctor, and she told me that to freeze my eggs in China, I either need a husband or I need to have cancer. And I told her, I don’t want either,” Yang remembers.
 ‘...A study published last year by the economists Ren Zeping and Liang Jianzhang found that more than 65% of 30- to 34-year-olds hoped to preserve their fertility via egg freezing. But the Chinese government has so far not welcomed this trend. In 2020, the national health commission said that allowing single women to freeze their eggs could give women “false hope” and encourage them to delay motherhood, “which is not conducive to protecting the health of women and offspring”. The topic of relaxing the rules around egg freezing is routinely discussed at China’s political meetings but

¹²⁵ SCMP, [China’s family planning agency says it will ‘intervene’ in abortions for....](#), 11 February 2022

¹²⁶ Reuters, [Chinese woman fighting for fertility rights hopes to end single mother....](#), 11 May 2023

¹²⁷ Britannica Money, [American Broadcasting Company \(ABC\)](#), updated 3 March 2025

¹²⁸ ABC News, [Unmarried Chinese women travel overseas for egg freezing, as](#), 17 June 2023

¹²⁹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

so far the national policy has remained fixed.¹³⁰

- 10.5.6 The CECC 2024 annual report, citing various sources, noted that proposals to promote childbirth included: ‘... allowing single women to have access to assistive reproductive technology, such as egg freezing (which, as of June 2024, was not permitted for single women in China)...’¹³¹

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10.6 Discrimination

- 10.6.1 Sixth Tone noted in an article from September 2021 that:

‘Conflicting societal views of single motherhood stem from the tension between China’s shifting population policies and traditional values. The loosening of childbirth restrictions has provided an opening for single mothers, as many of the barriers and penalties they once faced are removed from the books. However, the power of traditional family values remains strong, and policymakers often prefer to dance around the issue of single motherhood, signaling that it is neither permitted nor forbidden.

‘Policymakers’ silence only exacerbates the stigma surrounding unmarried mothering, influencing the decisions that individuals make regarding marriage and childbirth. Studies have shown that, although cohabitation and unmarried pregnancies are on the rise in China, unmarried pregnancies are still more likely to lead to “shotgun weddings” in China than in the West — and those who don’t get married are very likely to get an abortion instead.’¹³²

- 10.6.2 The New York Times noted in an article from July 2022 that: ‘Recent changes to Chinese law make it illegal to discriminate against the children of single parents, but some women still have to navigate an unsympathetic bureaucracy.’¹³³

- 10.6.3 Reuters reported in May 2023 that: ‘Childbirth out of wedlock is relatively rare in China, partly due to pervasive social stigma and cases of local authorities punishing women through fines or denying the child legal registration to access social benefits such as schooling and healthcare.’¹³⁴

- 10.6.4 The IRBC response September 2023 noted:

‘In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of history at Missouri State University with a focus on the sociopolitical aspects of reproduction in China, noted that middle-class women have stated that having children outside of marriage “can mar a woman’s reputation both in the eyes of her parents and perspective partners” and “limit” professional opportunities as “women with children—even married women” face workplace discrimination (Associate Professor 2023-09-09). The Associate Professor further noted that it is “more unusual” for unwed women in the countryside to have children, as single mothers and their children in poorer and more rural areas “likely face immense social discrimination” while wealthier, urban women “still face social prejudice and major structural

¹³⁰ The Guardian, [Society doesn’t want my kids’: China’s single women forced....](#), 17 July 2024

¹³¹ CECC, [2024 Annual Report](#), 16 December 2024

¹³² Sixth Tone, [China Wants Larger Families. Unless You’re a Single Mom](#), 1 September 2021

¹³³ The New York Times, [China Offers Women Perks for Having Babies, if They’re....](#), 6 July 2022

¹³⁴ Reuters, [Chinese woman fighting for fertility rights hopes to end single mother....](#), 11 May 2023

disadvantages" but "may" have options due to "social privilege" (2023-09-09).¹³⁵

10.6.5 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

'Single mothers in China have long faced stigma and societal discrimination, stemming from social expectations relating to preserving traditional familial values and gender roles. However, community views appear to have shifted. For example, a 2017 survey on the Legal Rights of Single Mothers in China showed that 87 per cent of respondents expressed support for single mothers and 59 per cent described their stance as "very supportive". In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that following the COVID-19 pandemic, women increasingly saw having children as personal choice, whether married or not.'¹³⁶

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10.7 Resources for single mothers and those without support

10.7.1 Peoples Dispatch, an international media outlet founded in 2018¹³⁷, regarding those who are homeless, noted in 2024 that:

'In the early 2000s, the issues of residential status, rights of migrant workers, and treatment of urban homeless people became a national matter. In 2003, the State Council – the highest executive organ of state power – issued the "Measures for the Rescue and Management of Itinerant and Homeless in Urban Areas". The new regulation created urban relief stations providing food rations and temporary shelters, abolished the mandatory detention system of people without hukou status or housing, and placed the responsibility on the local authorities for finding housing for homeless people in their hometowns.

'Under these measures, cities like Shanghai have set up relief stations for homeless people. When public security – the local police – and urban management officials encounter homeless people, they must assist them in accessing nearby relief stations. All costs are covered by the city's fiscal budget. ... Relief stations provide homeless people with food and basic accommodations, help those who are seriously ill access healthcare, assist them to return to the locations of their household registration by contacting their relatives or the local government, and arrange free transportation home when needed.

'Upon returning home, the local county-level government is responsible to help the homeless people, including contacting relatives for care and finding local employment. For a very small number of people who are elderly, have disabilities, or do not have relatives nor the ability to work, the local township people's government, or the Party-run street office, will provide national support for them in accordance with the "method of providing for extremely impoverished persons", which is stipulated in the 2014 "Interim Measures for Social Assistance". The content of the support includes providing basic living conditions, giving care to impoverished individuals who cannot take care of themselves, providing treatment for diseases, and handling funeral affairs, etc. This series of relief management measures ensure that administrative

¹³⁵ IRB of Canada, [Responses to Information Requests](#), 21 September 2023

¹³⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 3.204), 27 December 2024

¹³⁷ Peoples Dispatch, [Who we are](#), no date

law enforcement personnel in the city do not simply expel homeless people from the city, but must guarantee that they receive proper assistance, in terms of housing, work, and support systems.¹³⁸

- 10.7.2 China Daily, in an article from August 2023 gave the details of the following resources available to single mothers:

‘The V-Love Mothers program, initiated by Vipshop, an online retailer, provides legal and psychological assistance for single mothers. Since the end of 2017, Vipshop has invested 10 million yuan (\$1.3 million) [£1.05 million¹³⁹] to set up a special fund for single mothers in need, providing services such as health security, financial assistance, educational help and the protection of rights. The hotline is part of the program.

‘... The Single Mothers Support Program. Founded by the One Mother Mental Health Service Center, it focuses on the mental health of single mothers. This public welfare project is aimed at women who have suffered great psychological trauma after getting divorced or becoming widows and are raising children by themselves. Through online platforms, offline afternoon tea and workshops for mothers, the project aims to improve the women's inner strength, develop positive attitudes, and promote the healthy growth of their children.’¹⁴⁰

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11. Documentation

11.1 Birth permit and registration

- 11.1.1 A birth permit or birth permission certificate is a document that is required in order for a person to be able to access maternity care and to be able to apply for a new-born baby's hukou (household registration document)¹⁴¹.

- 11.1.2 Prior to 2016 a birth permit was required for a couple to have more than one child, after the introduction of the 2-child policy a couple planning on having a second child were no longer required to apply for a birth permit¹⁴².

- 11.1.3 Diplomatic sources confirmed in an email dated 16 March 2022 that: ‘Under the previous two-child policy, the State Council confirmed that applying for a birth permit or family planning certificate was not a legal requirement...’¹⁴³

- 11.1.4 Diplomatic sources further noted in 2022 that parents are urged to register all births but that:

‘According to open source research and the Birth Control Office in Beijing, there is no official China-wide policy on the administrative requirements following the birth of a child, which suggests parental obligations differ from province to province. Taking Beijing as an example, every birth must be registered, regardless of whether it is the first, second, or third child – this can be done in person or online. The Local Community Office should also be informed, to enable the issuance of a Maternal Health Manual and for a home visit to be arranged in order to check on the child's condition.

¹³⁸ Peoples Dispatch, [Why are there no slums in China?](#), 10 July 2023

¹³⁹ Xe.com, [10,000,000 CNY to GBP](#), 13 May 2025

¹⁴⁰ China Daily, [Hotline provides legal advice and hope for women in need](#), 22 August 2023

¹⁴¹ SCMP, [China confirms all citizens can now have third child amid policy change...](#), 20 July 2021

¹⁴² Library of Congress, [China: Two-Child Policy Becomes Law](#), 8 January 2016

¹⁴³ Diplomatic sources E-mail, [Annex A](#), 16 March 2022

Complications sometimes arise when unmarried single mothers try to register the birth of a child, potentially leading to difficulties in updating their Hukou (Family Book). However, the Chinese government is now encouraging more births in an attempt to future-proof economic development, so it is likely that a solution to this issue will be announced in the years ahead.¹⁴⁴

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11.2 Hukou (household registration) system

11.2.1 The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its Country of Origin Information Report China, published in June 2020 noted that:

‘In order to have the option of settling elsewhere, such as in a more urban environment, the hukou (household registration booklet) continues to be the determining factor during this reporting period, particularly for people living in rural areas. Registration in the city is needed to have access to good working conditions, social insurance, public services, medical care, and schooling for children. According to the Chinese government, in 2019, approximately 286 million people do not reside in the locality where they are officially registered according to their hukou. As a result, they do not enjoy the same rights in their actual place of residence as their officially registered fellow residents. In keeping with the government’s urbanisation policy, approximately one hundred million unregistered people should obtain a registration, particularly in smaller cities. The government is working to remove all barriers to internal relocations in smaller cities with a population of less than three million, and relax hukou regulations in cities with three to five million residents. For larger cities with more than five million residents, a points system is being implemented allowing people to apply for a hukou registration in that city. For example, in January 2020, the governor of the southern province of Guangdong announced a relaxation of the registration system for all cities except the larger cities of Guanzhou and Shenzhen.

‘In addition to this relaxation of the hukou regulations for the benefit of urbanisation, a number of other rules were also relaxed. For example, it is no longer required to apply for a passport in the city stated in the hukou registration. Instead, the application can be submitted in the locality where the applicant actually resides.’¹⁴⁵

11.2.2 In their March 2022 email diplomatic sources provided a translation of the 2016 State Council document ‘Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Solving the Problem of Persons without Hukou Registration’ which had the following sections related to hukou registration:

‘Section 2 Article 1 - People without a registered permanent residence who do not meet the family planning policy:

‘People without household registration who were born outside the policy or outside of marriage can apply for household registration by presenting their birth certificate and one parent’s household registration, marriage certificate or “illegitimate” birth documents, in accordance with the policy of voluntarily settling down with their mother or father. Those applying for settlement with their father but without a

¹⁴⁴ Diplomatic sources E-mail, [Annex A](#), 16 March 2022

¹⁴⁵ The Netherlands- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of origin information report China](#), July 2020

household registration must also provide a paternity test certificate issued by an approved agency.

‘Section 2 Article 7 - People without a household registration born out of marriage between Chinese citizens and foreigners/ stateless persons:

‘People born to a Chinese citizen and a foreigner/ stateless person without household registration and who has not obtained nationality from another country, can present their birth certificate, the “illegitimate” birth documents, and the Chinese citizen’s household registration to apply for their own household registration. If a birth certificate was not issued, a paternity test certificate issued by a qualified agency should be provided.’¹⁴⁶

- 11.2.3 The IRBC spoke with Marcella Siqueira Cassiano, ‘a lecturer and postdoctoral research fellow of sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland who has written multiple articles and book chapters on hukou and who is currently conducting research on hukou digitization and hukou’s relation to Chinese state surveillance and social control’¹⁴⁷, for their information response dated September 2022, she noted that: ‘... parents must register their children in the family’s hukou as soon as the child is born...’ She also noted that ‘... to register a child into a family hukou, the household head must report to the local police station and request the child’s inclusion while presenting the child’s birth certificate.’¹⁴⁸
- 11.2.4 The IRBC corresponded with Samantha Vortherms, ‘an assistant professor of political science at the University of California, Irvine—who specializes in migration, development, and social welfare in China’¹⁴⁹, for their information response dated September 2022. She noted that ‘... the policies of most cities ... stipulate that the parents of a newborn child must register their children within one month of the child’s birth ...’¹⁵⁰
- 11.2.5 Freedom House noted in their annual report ‘Freedom in the World 2024’ covering events in 2023 that: ‘The *hukou* (household registration) previously prohibited 295 million internal migrants from enjoying full legal rights as residents in the cities where they work. However, local governments have loosened their enforcement in recent years. In July 2024, the State Council published a plan to abolish hukou in cities with fewer than three million registered residents, while the system would be loosened in cities with three to five million residents.’¹⁵¹
- 11.2.6 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted:
- ‘The government operated a national household registration system (*hukou*) and maintained restrictions on the freedom to change one’s workplace or residence, although many provinces and localities continued to ease restrictions for certain groups of students, investors, and professionals. While many rural residents migrated to the cities, where per capita disposable income was approximately three times the rural per capita income, they often could not change their official residence or workplace

¹⁴⁶ Diplomatic sources E-mail, [Annex A](#), 16 March 2022

¹⁴⁷ IRB of Canada, [Responses to Information Requests](#), 20 September 2022

¹⁴⁸ IRB of Canada, [Responses to Information Requests](#), 20 September 2022

¹⁴⁹ IRB of Canada, [Responses to Information Requests](#), 20 September 2022

¹⁵⁰ IRB of Canada, [Responses to Information Requests](#), 20 September 2022

¹⁵¹ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025](#), 2025

within the country. Most cities had annual quotas for the number of new temporary residence permits they could issue, and all workers, including university graduates, had to compete for a limited number of such permits. It was particularly difficult for rural residents to obtain household registration in provincial capitals, but outside those cities many provinces removed or lowered barriers to moving from a rural area to an urban one.

‘The household registration system added to the difficulties faced by rural residents, even after they relocated to urban areas and found employment. According to the *Statistical Communique of the People’s Republic of China on 2019 National Economic and Social Development*, published in 2020 by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, 280 million individuals lived outside the jurisdiction of their household registration. Migrant workers and their families faced numerous obstacles regarding working conditions and labor rights. Many were unable to access public services, such as public education for their children or social insurance, in the cities where they lived and worked because they were not legally registered urban residents.’¹⁵²

11.2.7 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

‘Hukou is a household registration system that clarifies an individual’s place of residence and defines eligibility for social welfare and government services such as education or health services in a local government area. It often reflects an individual’s place of birth, or even their parents’ place of birth, rather than their current place of residence. The modern hukou system is an electronic record held by local police.

‘Hukou policies were decentralised in the 1990s, with local governments allowed to set their own rules about registering new citizens. Practical hukou reform remains at an early stage. In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that some local governments had begun issuing “temporary hukou” to allow migrant workers similar entitlements to locals, including subsidised health insurance and access to local hospitals for treatment. More restrictive points systems to obtain hukou in some cities of over 5 million people still exist, where good employment records, education and housing may be an advantage.

‘In August 2023, the Ministry of Public Security announced plans to lower the bar for obtaining an urban hukou, encouraging local governments in cities of 3-5 million people to relax requirements and those in cities of below 3 million people to eliminate all requirements entirely. Jiangsu Province’s government responded by scrapping all limits on non-residents applying for hukou in 11 of its 13 cities. Zhejiang Province also lifted restrictions for obtaining hukou for all of its cities except Hangzhou. Larger cities like Shanghai and Chengdu have eased the process of obtaining hukou for certain groups, like recent graduates. Improvements to its points-based policy were also announced as part of hukou reform in cities like Beijing. The outcomes document of the July 2024 Third Plenum of the CCP Central Committee (a significant meeting guiding national economic strategy) foreshadowed further, gradual relaxations to the hukou system.

‘Migration away from cities to regional areas also occurs, although much less commonly. The very high cost of living in some large cities and demanding

¹⁵² USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

working culture in corporate China has forced some young people to return to their family and home regions. From 2021, some former emigrants were being enticed back by improved infrastructure and services in rural areas that had accompanied China's rapid development.

'... In 2016, the government officially stated that all children born out of wedlock were eligible for a hukou. ... In-country sources told DFAT that it had become easier to be a single parent since 2020 when requirements for both parents to provide identification details for a child to obtain a hukou (required to enrol in school) were removed. ... From 2020, children could choose to be registered either in their mother or fathers' city of residence. Children born to an LGBTQIA+ parent were included under these changes, although same-sex couples were still unable to adopt legally.'¹⁵³

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12. Freedom of movement

12.1 Internal migration

12.1.1 China's population is around 1.4 billion in a country of over 9,596,960 sq km,¹⁵⁴ which is about 40 times bigger than the UK¹⁵⁵. There are many large cities including Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Tianjin and Shenzhen¹⁵⁶.

12.1.2 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted: 'The law provided for freedom of internal movement ... but the government did not respect these rights.'¹⁵⁷

12.1.3 The 2024 DFAT report stated:

'Internal migration has been a key feature of China's economic and social life for decades, with migration to cities in the wealthy eastern provinces particularly prevalent. A 2020 US Department of State estimate suggested that 28 million people lived in a place other than where their hukou residence was registered with a local government. In 2023 there were no legal impediments to relocation, but the hukou system sometimes may have limited freedom of movement in practice.

'As Mandarin is spoken throughout China, DFAT assesses Han Chinese face little difficulty in resettling to different parts of the country. It may be more difficult for ethnic minorities, especially those who natively speak different dialects or languages, as well as people with disabilities to resettle to other areas of China.'¹⁵⁸

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¹⁵³ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 2.22- 2.25 & 3.208), 27 December 2024

¹⁵⁴ CIA, [World Factbook \(China\)](#), last updated 7 May 2025

¹⁵⁵ CIA, [World Factbook \(UK\)](#), last updated 2 May 2025

¹⁵⁶ CIA, [China - The World Factbook](#), last updated 17 April 2025

¹⁵⁷ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 22 April 2024

¹⁵⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report China](#) (paragraph 5.25- 5.26), 27 December 2024

Annexe A: Diplomatic source

From: [REDACTED]
Sent on: Wednesday, March 16, 2022 1:34:30 AM
To: [REDACTED]@homeoffice.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Official Sensitive- Request for information on the family planning policy

Hi [REDACTED]

Please see below.

Kind regards,
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@homeoffice.gov.uk>
Sent: 01 February 2022 17:32
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Official Sensitive- Request for information on the family planning policy

Hi [REDACTED]

I am currently updating our CPIN on China's family planning policy and believe there may be a country guidance case in the pipeline too so just wanted to ask some questions regarding the updated family planning policy.

Q) If couples wish to have a 3rd child do they still have to obtain a birth permit/ family planning certificate? According to open source research and the Birth Control Office in Beijing, there is no official China-wide policy on the administrative requirements following the birth of a child, which suggests parental obligations differ from province to province. Taking Beijing as an example, every birth must be registered, regardless of whether it is the first, second, or third child – this can be done in person or online. The Local Community Office should also be informed, to enable the issuance of a Maternal Health Manual and for a home visit to be arranged in order to check on the child's condition. Complications sometimes arise when unmarried single mothers try to register the birth of a child, potentially leading to difficulties in updating their Hukou (Family Book). However, the Chinese government is now encouraging more births in an attempt to future-proof economic development, so it is likely that a solution to this issue will be announced in the years ahead.

Q) Would such a document only be required where couples are having children in excess of the policy limit? Under the previous two-child policy, the State Council confirmed that applying for a birth permit or family planning certificate was not a legal requirement, but urged parents register all births in accordance with the process detailed above, and to comply with any additional provincial-level obligations.

Q) Are you aware of any reports, since the updated family planning policy was introduced, of forced sterilisation/ abortions undertaken to comply with family planning restrictions (I am aware of reports of these occurring in Xinjiang but could find no recent reports that these practices have been occurring elsewhere) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] is not aware of any reports of forced sterilisation or abortions in recent years, [REDACTED]

Here is some further information on China's family planning policy if needed:

The Chinese government is encouraging families to have more children for a number of reasons, most of which are economic; however, the new 3-child policy has yet to be officially implemented. The decision was made to allow a third child on 31 May 2021 during a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, but a formal process is required to activate the policy. To enable this, the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee must first revise the Population and Family Planning Law, before the various Provincial Standing Committees across China update their regulations, after which they will announce the implementation of the new law. Alongside this, there are a number of related procedures and regulations that still relate to the current 2-child regulations, so these will need to be updated before the 3-child policy can go live.

According to our research, this was very similar to when the 2-child policy was implemented a few years ago in China. Despite there being a clear time lag between the policymaking and implementation phases, most local Health Commissions adopted the new regulations pretty much straight away, meaning that families registering new born children during this time were not punished (although this is impossible for us to verify of course). When the 2-child policy announcement was released, an official at the National Health and Family Planning Commission stated that, in cases where a new regulation has a clear benefit to families, communities, and the Chinese government, it should be implemented as soon as possible. We therefore judge that a similar approach is probably being taken for the 3-child policy in most parts of the country.

It is worth noting that, during the days of the old 1-child policy, families who opted to have more children were still being encouraged by the Chinese government to register their new-borns through the relevant provincial authority, as this is more beneficial in terms of national population management. Our research has shown that, in 2016, the State Council published its '[Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Solving the Problem of Persons without Hukou Registration](#)' (official guidance in Chinese at gov.cn). The following is a rough translation of the most relevant Articles:

Section 1 Article 2 - Basic principles:

Adhere to policy management in accordance with the law, and earnestly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of every citizen registered in accordance with the law. Clearly understand the household registration management process, and implement an effective policy for persons without a household registration. Planning in related fields such as vagrancy and begging, nationality management etc. shall be considered and promoted in coordination with this policy.

Section 1 Article 3 - Objectives:

Further improve the household registration policy, prohibit the establishment of any preconditions that do not meet household registration regulations, and strengthen household registration management. Comprehensively solve the household registration problem for people without household registration, and effectively ensure that each citizen holds a permanent household

registration in accordance with the law. Strive to achieve national household and citizen registration to help achieve the goal of identity number accuracy, uniqueness, and population management.

Section 2 Article 1 - People without a registered permanent residence who do not meet the family planning policy:

People without household registration who were born outside the policy or outside of marriage can apply for household registration by presenting their birth certificate and one parent's household registration, marriage certificate or 'illegitimate' birth documents, in accordance with the policy of voluntarily settling down with their mother or father. Those applying for settlement with their father but without a household registration must also provide a paternity test certificate issued by an approved agency.

Section 2 Article 7 - People without a household registration born out of marriage between Chinese citizens and foreigners/ stateless persons:

People born to a Chinese citizen and a foreigner/ stateless person without household registration and who has not obtained nationality from another country, can present their birth certificate, the 'illegitimate' birth documents, and the Chinese citizen's household registration to apply for their own household registration. If a birth certificate was not issued, a paternity test certificate issued by a qualified agency should be provided.

Section 2 Article 8 - Other people without a household registration:

For people without household registration due to other reasons, the unit or individual who undertakes guardianship duties may apply for a household registration, after investigation and verification by the public security body in conjunction with other relevant departments.

Many thanks for your help

Kind regards

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Country Policy and Research Manager
Country Policy and Information Team
International Strategy, Engagement and Devolution
Science, Technology, Analysis, Research and Strategy (STARS)

Home Office

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[@ukhomeoffice](#)

[Redacted]

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Annex B: Diplomatic source

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 15 April 2025 07:29
To: [REDACTED]@homeoffice.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Official Sensitive- Request for information on the family planning policy

Do you trust this email? This email originated from outside the [Home Office](#), or came from a Home Office system that has not been certified. Please exercise caution before opening attachments or clicking on links within this email or any suspicious email, particularly from unknown senders.

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Hi [REDACTED]

Apologies on the delay. Got some very general details back [REDACTED]
Like many things here the reality on the ground is difficult to gauge against the Official Laws. It seems to be a rather “flexible” approach now on this policy.

Q) Are you aware of any reports of fees being applied to those who have children in excess of the policy? – not aware of any such case, imagine it would be fairly rare

Q) Are you aware of any reports, since the updated family planning policy was introduced, of forced sterilisation/ abortions undertaken to comply with family planning restrictions (I am aware of reports of these occurring in Xinjiang but could find no recent reports that these practices have been occurring elsewhere). Not aware of anything [REDACTED]

Q) Since the introduction of the 3-child policy and the shift towards encouraging births are single mothers still liable to pay social compensation fees and do they face any difficulties registering their children once born? Believe situation for single mothers is largely unchanged. There have been some local level initiatives to offer them more similar benefits to married couples but nothing at national level so coverage is inconsistent.

[REDACTED]

Best regards, [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@homeoffice.gov.uk>

Sent: 04 March 2025 19:41

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Official Sensitive- Request for information on the family planning policy

Hi [REDACTED]

I hope you are well.

I am currently updating our Country Policy and Information Note on China's family planning policy and am trying to address some gaps in information and a specific area that was highlighted in the country guidance case from 2012 ([AX \(Family Planning Scheme\) China CG \[2012\] UKUT 00097 \(IAC\)](#)). I would really appreciate your help and input on these areas.

I've put together a few questions and was hoping you'd be able to answer them.

- Q) Are you aware of any reports of fees being applied to those who have children in excess of the policy?
- Q) Are you aware of any reports, since the updated family planning policy was introduced, of forced sterilisation/ abortions undertaken to comply with family planning restrictions (I am aware of reports of these occurring in Xinjiang but could find no recent reports that these practices have been occurring elsewhere).
- Q) Since the introduction of the 3-child policy and the shift towards encouraging births are single mothers still liable to pay social compensation fees and do they face any difficulties registering their children once born?

[REDACTED]
Happy to discuss further if needed.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Country Policy and Research Manager- Asia Pacific
Country Policy and Information Team
International Strategy Engagement & Devolution Directorate

Home Office | [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Mob: [REDACTED]

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Demography
 - Demography
 - Population
 - Age structure
 - Number of married couples
 - Birth rates
- Legal context
 - Constitution
 - Legislation
- Family Planning policy
 - Background to the 1-child policy
 - Introduction of the 2-child policy
 - Introduction of the 3-child policy
 - Reaction to the 3-child policy
 - Enforcement and incentives of the family planning policy
 - Enforced abortion, sterilisation and birth control
 - Single and unmarried mothers
 - Unregistered children (Heihaizi 'black children')
 - Children born overseas
 - Child gender selection
 - Discrimination
- Documentation
 - Birth permit and registration
 - Hukou (registration) system

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

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Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

Updates to country information and amendment to assessment to address the changes to the family planning policy.

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Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

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The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support them in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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