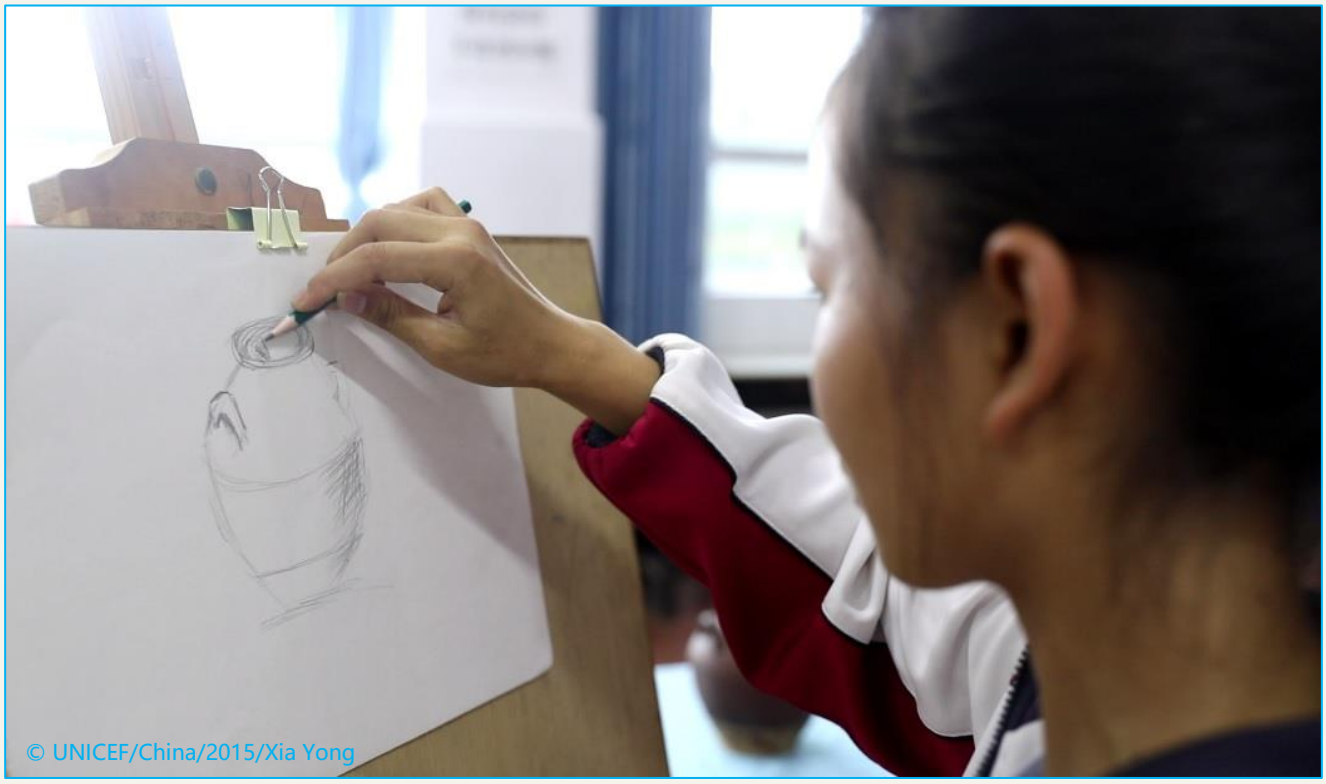
Population Status of Adolescents in China in 2015
Facts and Figures



Adolescence, which takes places during the ages of 10 to 19 years, marks the beginning of many transitions – from childhood to adulthood, from school to the workplace and into society. Adolescents experience monumental changes in every aspect of their lives – physically, cognitively, emotionally and socially. Understanding the population status of adolescents can assist governments, communities and families to better respond to the specific characteristics and needs of adolescents by providing appropriate policies, services and support to enable them to reach their full potential and prepare for the future. Censuses and surveys are rich sources of basic data and information on adolescents, reflecting the demographic development and the key characteristics of the different sub-groups. Analysis of the available data can support enhanced understanding of the challenges faced by adolescents and help inform more evidence-based decision making to address these challenges towards the fulfilment of their rights. This publication describes and analyzes the status of China's adolescent population, based on data from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey and previous censuses and inter-census surveys.

Definitions:

Adolescents : Adolescents are persons aged 10–19 years.

Migrant population: The migrant population refers to persons whose place of residence is different from the location (e.g. town/township or street committee) of their household registration (*hukou*), and who have left the location of their household registration for more than six months. It excludes the population whose current place of residence is different from that of their *hukou* registration, but is within the same city-level administration.

Poverty-stricken area: Poverty-stricken areas include the original 592 "key poverty counties" identified by the Government of China for focused poverty alleviation efforts, and the 680 counties that are located in 14 "poverty blocks" (11 blocks, along with the Tibet Autonomous Region, ethnically Tibetan regions in four provinces, and South Xinjiang), as defined in the new *Outline for Development-oriented Poverty Reduction for China's Rural Areas (2011–2020)*. There is an overlap of 440 counties between the list of "key poverty counties" and the updated "poverty blocks". Therefore, there are 832 distinct counties categorized as "poverty-stricken areas."

Data Sources:

The data in this publication mainly comes from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China, as well as from previous censuses and inter-census surveys. Currently, China conducts a national census every ten years, with six censuses conducted to date, in 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010. China conducts an inter-census population survey in the middle year between two censuses, with a sampling fraction of 1% (also called "mini-census"). The two most recent inter-census surveys were conducted in 2005 and 2015.

Acknowledgement:

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1. Changes in the size of the adolescent population

According to data from the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey, the adolescent population aged 10–19 in China was 146 million in 2015, accounting for 10.6% of the total population. Affected by the strict implementation of the family planning policy in the early 1980s, the size and proportion of China's adolescent population has rapidly declined from 257 million in 1982 to 195 million in 1995, a decrease of 9.4 percentage points in terms of its proportion of the total population. There was a small peak in the total number of births when the family planning policy was slightly loosened in the mid-1980s, resulting in an increase in the size of the adolescent population and its proportion of the total population in 2000. The scale of the birth cohorts has continued to decline since the 1990s, accordingly, the size and proportion of the adolescent population has also declined since 2000.

Figure 1: Population of adolescents aged 10–19 in China, 1982–2015[1]

Year	Total population (Millions)	Adolescents aged 10 – 19		Young adolescents aged 10 – 14	
		Populaiton (Millions)	Proportion of total populaiton	Populaiton (Millions)	Proportion of total populaiton
1982	1008.18	257.18	25.5%	131.81	13.1%
1990	1133.68	217.39	19.2%	97.23	8.6%
1995	1207.78	195.08	16.2%	105.94	8.8%
2000	1265.83	228.43	18.0%	125.40	9.9%
2005	1306.28	213.49	16.3%	103.30	7.9%
2010	1339.72	174.80	13.0%	74.91	5.6%
2015	1373.49	146.23	10.6%	71.12	5.2%

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 1995, 2005 and 2015 1% National Population Sample Surveys

2. Composition of the adolescent population

2.1 Age composition

The adolescent population in 2015 decreased by 28.57 million from the figures in 2010. Particularly, among adolescents aged 15–19, every single age group decreased by a significant margin, between 4.4 million and 5.7 million. In 2015, the size of each single age group of adolescents aged 10–19 was between 13.3 million and 16.2 million.

Figure 2: Population of adolescents aged 10–19, by sex and age (millions), 2015

	2015			Increase between 2010 and 2015
	Male	Female	Total	Total
Age 10	8.13	6.85	14.98	0.53
Age 11	7.91	6.68	14.59	0.65
Age 12	7.22	6.08	13.30	-2.10
Age 13	7.47	6.26	13.73	-1.50
Age 14	7.85	6.67	14.52	-1.37
Age 15	7.55	6.00	13.55	-4.47
Age 16	7.79	6.58	14.37	-4.42
Age 17	8.57	7.38	15.95	-4.83
Age 18	8.05	7.02	15.07	-5.69
Age 19	8.41	7.77	16.18	-5.36
Age 10 – 19	78.94	67.29	146.23	-28.57

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Census and 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

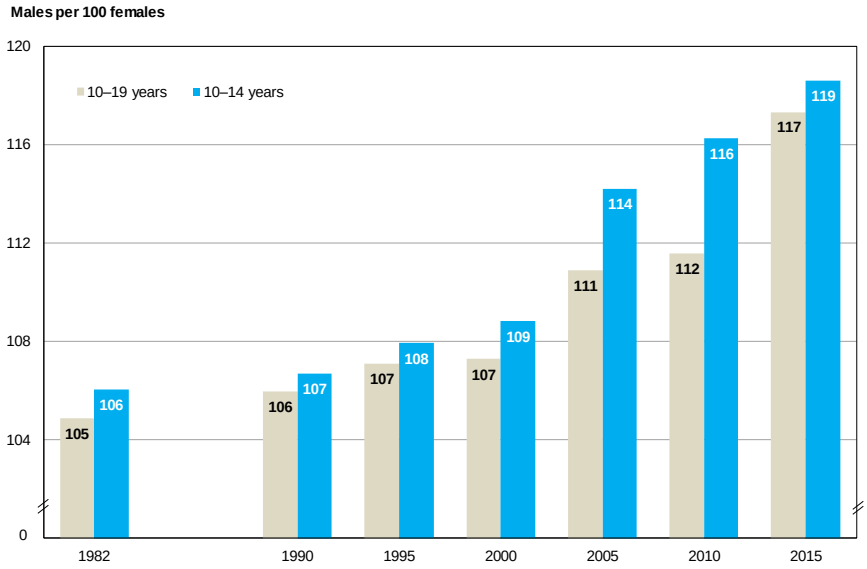
[1] The reference time of the Census in 1982 and 1990 was July 1. Since then, the Census and the 1% National Population Sample Survey have changed the reference time to November 1. Due to different timing, the relevant data presented may differ slightly than the year-end figures published in the China Statistical Yearbook.

2.2 Sex composition

In 2015, there were 78.94 million adolescent males, accounting for 54.0%; and there were 67.29 million adolescent females, accounting for 46.0%. There were 11.65 million more adolescent males than adolescent females.

The long-term imbalance of the sex ratio at birth has been demonstrated in the sex ratio of the adolescent population. Since the 1980s, the sex ratio of the adolescent population has continued to increase, from 104.9 in 1982 to 117.3 in 2015. The sex ratio imbalance is particularly significant among younger adolescents aged 10–14, rising from 106.0 in 1982 to 118.6 in 2015.

Figure 3: Sex-ratio of adolescents, 1982–2015



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 1995, 2005 and 2015 1% National Population Sample Surveys

2.3 Urban-rural distribution

In 2015, the adolescent population in urban areas was 72.25 million, accounting for 49.4% of the total adolescent population. In other words, nearly half of the adolescents in the country already reside in urban areas. There were 73.98 million adolescents residing in rural areas, accounting for 50.6% of the total adolescent population. Since the reform and opening up policies, China's rate of urbanization has made great strides. The proportion of urban population in the country increased from 21.1% in 1982 to 56.1% in 2015. In the same period, the proportion of urban adolescents in the total adolescent population increased from 18.3% in 1982 to 49.4% in 2015.

Figure 4: Size and proportion of adolescents aged 10–19 in urban and rural areas, 1982–2015

Year	Total population urbanization rate	Population of adolescents aged 10 – 19 (Millions)			Percentage of adolescents in urban areas
		Urban	Rural	Naitonal	
1982	21.1%	47.17	210.01	257.18	18.3%
1990	26.4%	49.61	167.78	217.39	22.8%
2000	36.2%	78.03	150.39	228.43	34.2%
2010	50.0%	86.40	88.40	174.80	49.4%
2015	56.1%	72.25	73.98	146.23	49.4%

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Surveys

2.4 Ethnic minority adolescents

In 2015, the total number of ethnic minority adolescents aged 10–19 was 16.03 million, a 1.60 million decrease from the 2010 figure. Similar to the population trends of Han adolescents, the population of ethnic minority adolescents is also declining but the rate of decline is slower. This has led to a year-on-year increase in the proportion of ethnic minority adolescents in the total adolescent population, from 6.7% in 1982 to 11.0% in 2015.

The 10 ethnic minority groups with the largest adolescent populations are Zhuang, Hui, Uyghur, Yi, Miao, Tujia, Tibetan, Manchu, Mongolian, and Buyi, totaling 12.78 million and accounting for 80% of all ethnic minority adolescents. The Zhuang adolescent population is the largest, reaching 2.22 million and accounting for 14% of all ethnic minority adolescents. Aside from Mongolian and Buyi adolescents, totaling 670,000 and 470,000, respectively, the other eight ethnic minority groups have over 1 million adolescents each.

45.4% of ethnic minority adolescents lived in poor rural areas. There is a development discrepancy between ethnic minority adolescents and Han adolescents, which to a large extent is the reflection of the rural-urban and regional disparities. This requires equitable and integrated development of rural and urban areas, and balanced development among regions.

Figure 5: Total population and adolescent population, by Han and ethnic minority, 1982–2015

Year	National (Millions)	Han (Millions)	Ethnic minority (Millions)	Proportion of ethnic minority
Total population				
1982	1008.18	940.88	67.30	6.7%
1990	1133.68	1042.48	91.20	8.0%
2000	1265.83	1159.40	106.43	8.4%
2010	1339.72	1225.93	113.79	8.5%
2015	1373.49	1256.14	117.35	8.5%
Adolescents aged 10 – 19				
1982	257.18	239.97	17.21	6.7%
1990	217.39	197.09	20.30	9.3%
2000	228.43	206.19	22.24	9.7%
2010	174.80	157.16	17.63	10.1%
2015	146.23	130.20	16.03	11.0%

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses;
2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

2.5 Adolescents residing in poverty areas

In 2015, the adolescent population in China's poverty areas (including a total of 832 key poverty alleviation counties and poverty-stricken counties) was roughly estimated to be around 35 million[2], accounting for 24% of the total adolescent population. In poverty areas, 30.7% of adolescents resided in urban areas, which is far below the national average of 49.4%. In addition, 69.3% (corresponding to about 24 million) lived in poverty-stricken rural areas, and their survival and development status required special attention.

In 2015, 19.7% of adolescents residing in poverty areas 'migrated out', higher than the national average rate of adolescent migration (18.8%). About 63.7% of migrant adolescents from poor areas migrated to non-poverty areas to seek opportunities that allow them to escape poverty.

3. Migrant adolescents

3.1 Scale

In 2015, the number of migrant adolescents aged 10–19 was 27.48 million, accounting for 18.8% of the total adolescent population in the country. In other words, nearly 2 out of every 10 adolescents in China are migrants. This ratio is one percentage point higher than the proportion of the migrant population in the total population of the country (17.9%), demonstrating a higher mobility among adolescents.

Migrant adolescents mainly emigrate from rural areas and reside in urban areas. In 2015, there were 15.66 million migrant adolescents with rural *hukou* registration, accounting for 57.0% of all migrant adolescents. Moreover, there were 24.02 million migrant adolescents residing in urban areas, which accounted for 87.4% of all migrant adolescents. The concentration of migrant adolescents in urban areas has led to high visibility of migrant adolescents, with the proportion of migrant adolescents in the urban adolescent population reaching 33.2%. This means that one out of every three urban adolescents was a migrant.

Before 2010, the size of the migrant adolescent population grew rapidly. This was especially evident during the period between 2005 and 2010, when the total number of migrant adolescents doubled from 16.03 million to 33.04 million. The proportion of migrants in the adolescent population also steadily increased before 2010, from 1.9% in 1990 to 18.9% in 2010. Since 2010, this trend of increase has reversed. Although the participation rate in migration of adolescents has remained stable between 2010 and 2015, the size of the migrant adolescent population has declined sharply due to the rapid decline in the total adolescent population, with a decrease of 5.56 million adolescents since 2010.

[2] The total adolescent population living in the 832 poverty-stricken counties was 35 million, but not all of them are considered poor adolescents living below the poverty standard, and not all poor adolescents reside in poverty-stricken counties.

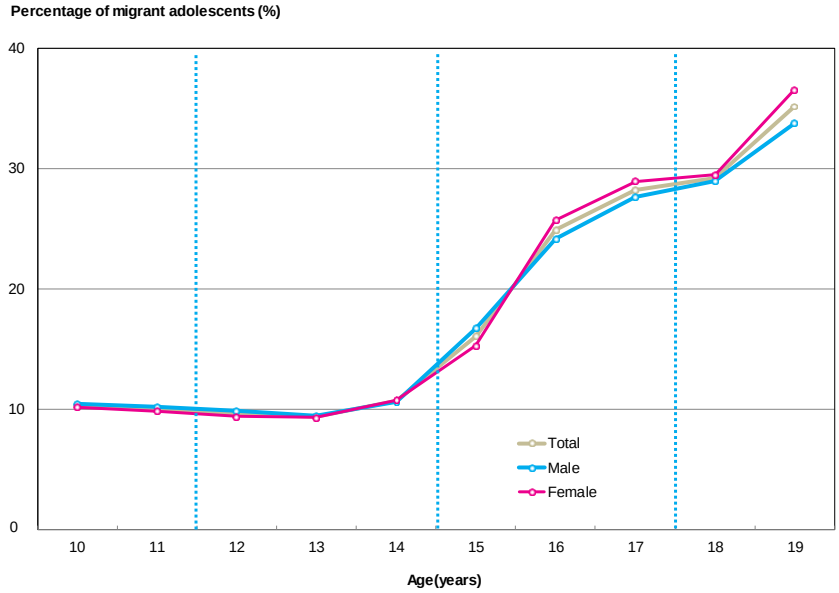
Figure 6: Size and urban-rural composition of migrant adolescents, 2000–2015

	2000	2005	2010	2015
Population of adolesencts (Millions)	228.43	213.49	174.80	146.23
Proportion of migrant adolescents in total population of adolesents	4.1%	7.5%	18.9%	18.8%
Population of migrant adolescents (Millions)	9.39	16.03	33.04	27.48
Composition of migrant adolescents				
# Living in urban areas	76.1%	82.6%	87.6%	87.4%
Living in rural areas	23.9%	17.4%	12.4%	12.6%
Proportion of migrant adolescents in urban adolescents	9.2%	15.5%	33.5%	33.2%

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses;
2005 and 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

The participation rate in migration among adolescents increases with age, and it was especially high after the completion of compulsory education (among adolescents over age 15). There are two key reasons: on the one hand, after completion of compulsory education, adolescents in rural areas who do not continue with senior secondary education or drop out of school often join the new generation of migrant workers; on the other hand, as many senior secondary schools are concentrated in urban areas, it is common for adolescents to pursue senior secondary education in urban areas without converting their rural *hukou* registration. According to the definition of migrant population used in this publication, these adolescents are defined as migrant adolescents. From a gender perspective, the participation rate in migration of females of all ages was close to that of males, though the participation rate in migration among girls aged 19 was slightly higher than that of boys of the same age.

Figure 7: Migrant participation rate of adolescents, by sex and age, 2015



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

3.2 Distance and geographic distribution of migration

Migrant adolescents are more concentrated in some provinces. In 2015, 11 provinces in the country each had more than 1 million migrant adolescents. A total of 17.66 million migrant adolescents were concentrated in 11 provinces, accounting for 64.3% of the total adolescent population. Guangdong and Shandong have the largest number of migrant adolescents, with more than 2 million adolescents in each province.

Figure 8: Number of migrant adolescents by province, 2015

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

Generally, most adolescents migrate within their own provinces. Among migrant adolescents, 30.8% migrated to townships within their counties, 44.7% migrated to counties or cities within their provinces, and the remaining 24.4% migrated to other provinces. The proportion of adolescents migrating to other provinces continued to decline since 2005 (44.6%).

Looking at the geographic distribution, migrant adolescents in municipalities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin have mainly migrated from other provinces. Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces have also attracted a large number of migrant adolescents from other provinces. Provinces such as Hebei, Shaanxi, Henan and Shandong predominantly have adolescents migrating to other townships within their counties.

3.3 Duration of migration

Differences exist in the permanency of migrant adolescents living and studying in their place of migration. There are long-term residents and a considerable number of new migrants, both groups exhibiting strong age patterns.

Overall, 22.3% of adolescents have resided in their place of migration for more than five years, and 55.8% have resided in their place of migration for less than two years.

Younger adolescents aged 10–14 had the highest rates of permanency, with 56.3% residing in their place of migration for more than five years. The proportion of migrant adolescents aged 10–14 in Beijing and Shanghai who have lived in the city for more than five years has already reached more than 80%. Most migrant adolescents aged 15–19 were new migrants, of which 29.1% resided in in their place of migration for less than one year, and 80.5% resided in in their place of migration for less than three years.

4. Adolescent education

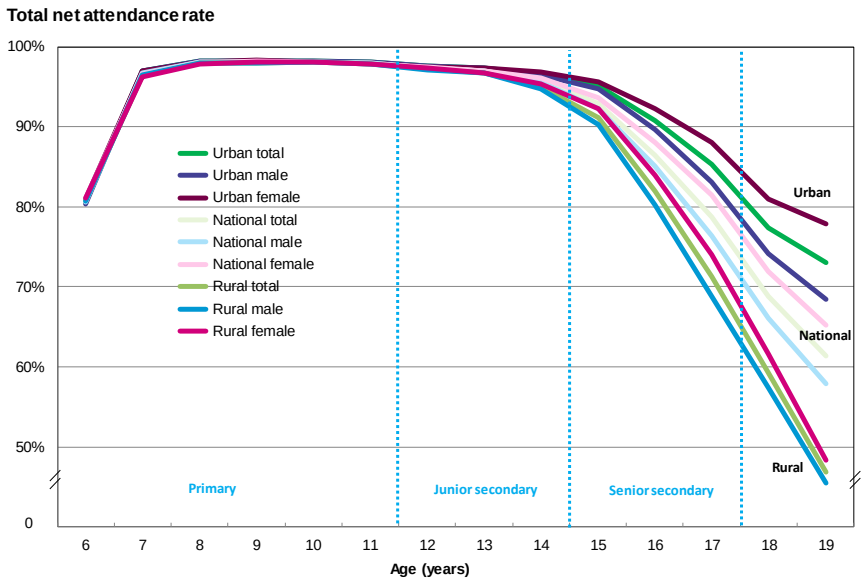
4.1 Status and progress

In 2015, the vast majority of adolescents aged 10–19 were in school (86.9%). In the 15 years since 2000, China achieved universalization of junior secondary education and rapidly advanced senior secondary education. The school attendance rate[3] of adolescents increased by 13 percentage points.

Similar to the situation in 2010, there were no significant urban-rural differences and gender differences among the compulsory school-age adolescents in 2015. However, with the increase in age, especially among senior secondary school-age adolescents and older adolescents, the school attendance rate gradually declined. Moreover, urban-rural differences become more prominent, with girls having higher level of education than boys, especially evident among girls from urban areas.

[3] Attendance rate means “total net attendance rate”, which is the total number of students of the official age group for a given level of education who are attending school at any level of education, expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population (UNESCO).

Figure 9: School attendance rate of children and adolescents aged 6–19, by urban-rural, sex and age, 2015



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

4.2 Gaps between different groups

There are still difficulties and challenges in adolescent education in China, and a considerable number of adolescents are out-of-school. The differences between groups are particularly worthy of further attention. Examining the data on adolescents in terms of school attendance and receiving or completing compulsory education[4] between 2000 and 2015, rural areas lagged behind urban areas, poverty-stricken areas lagged behind non-poverty areas, and ethnic minorities lagged behind Han Chinese. In 2015, the proportion of adolescents aged 10–19 who did not receive or completing compulsory education in rural areas was more than twice that of urban areas, and the proportion of ethnic minority adolescents was more than four times that of Han Chinese. Migrant adolescents receiving or completing compulsory education fared better than other adolescents, but because some of the older migrant adolescents joined the ranks of migrant workers, their school attendance rate was lower.

Figure 10: School attendance rate and proportion of adolescents aged 10–19 who failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required, 2000, 2010 and 2015

		Failed to receive or complete compulsory education as required (%)			Attendance rate (%)		
		2000	2010	2015	2000	2010	2015
Adolescents aged 10 – 19		9.2	3.1	2.3	73.7	81.0	86.9
Urban/rural	Urban	3.9	1.5	1.2	78.7	84.6	90.0
	Rural	11.5	4.5	3.3	71.2	77.7	83.9
Sex	Male	8.0	3.1	2.4	75.1	80.8	85.9
	Female	10.6	3.1	2.2	72.2	81.3	88.0
Ethnicity	Han	7.7	2.7	1.7	74.7	81.7	87.5
	Ethnic minorities	22.8	9.8	7.2	64.7	74.9	79.4
Poverty-stricken areas		14.9	6.2	4.3	71.0	79.9	84.9
Migrant adolescents		10.1	2.3	1.7	53.2	73.0	82.7

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

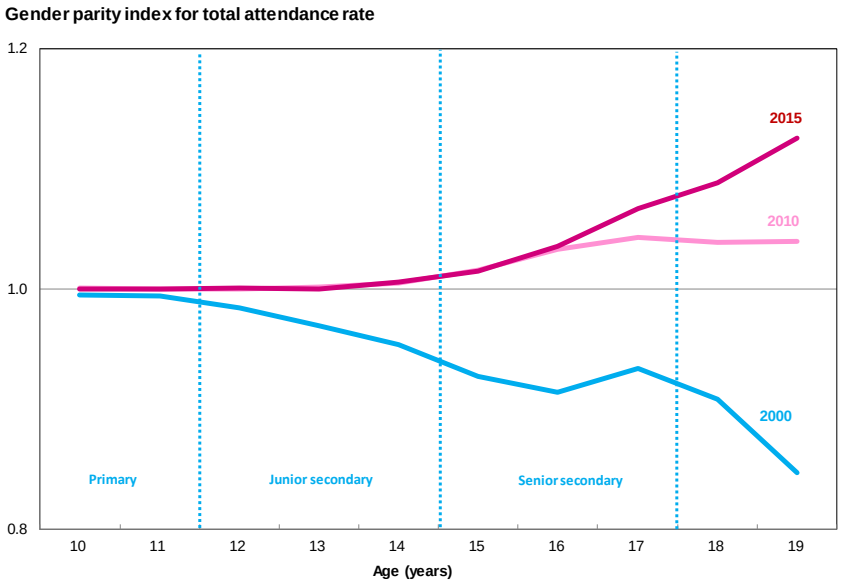
In terms of gender, while adolescent girls were worse off at all stages of education when compared to adolescent boys in 2000; this trend has reversed since 2010. Figure 11 uses the gender parity index[5] to characterize the gender differences in school attendance rates among adolescents ages 10–19 in 2000–2015. Since 2000, the attendance rates of boys and girls

[4] According to the *Compulsory Education Law* of the People's Republic of China promulgated in 1986, children of school age are subject to nine years of compulsory education. In this publication, people who fail to receive or complete compulsory education include those who have never been to school, those who have graduated from primary school only, and those who have dropped out of primary school or junior secondary school.

[5] The gender parity index is defined as the ratio of female to male values of a given indicator. Here the gender parity index is used to compare the gender difference in terms of total net attendance rate. Gender Parity Index equal to 1 indicates parity between females and males. In general, a value less than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of boys and a value greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of girls (UNESCO).

in primary education was quite similar, but the attendance rates of adolescent boys in junior secondary education and above was significantly higher than adolescent girls, demonstrating a clear male advantage. However, this trend has disappeared since 2010, with the attendance rates of boys and girls in primary and junior secondary education being basically the same, and the attendance rates of adolescent girls in senior secondary education higher than adolescent boys. In 2015, attendance rates of adolescent girls in senior secondary education and above was significantly higher than adolescent boys, indicating a female advantage.

Figure 11: Gender parity index for attendance rate of adolescents, 2000, 2010 and 2015



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, 2000 and 2010 Population Censuses; 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey

4.3 Out-of-school adolescents

Some 13.1% of all adolescents aged 10–19 years, or an estimated 19.19 million, were out of school. Of this group, 62.6% were in rural areas. In addition, more than half were older adolescents aged 18 and 19, with more boys (56.6%), who mainly resided in counties or county-level cities. Of the out-of-school adolescents, 17.4% still did not complete compulsory education.

Of the out-of-school adolescents aged 16–19, 73.0% were employed, corresponding to a population of 11.88 million. Adolescents were mainly employed in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trades, and catering services, accounting for 33.5%, 26.9%, 10.2% and 8.9%, respectively.

4.4 Youth literacy rate

With the universalization of compulsory education, the literacy rate of China's youth aged 15–24 years was high between 2010 and 2015, remaining unchanged at 99.6%, and an increase from 2000. There were slight differences between urban and rural areas and between males and females in 2015, but the differences were not as apparent as 2000. Basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills are very important for personal development. It is particularly critical to develop the human capital of youths aged 15–24 who are about to or just entered adulthood, as it can predict future social and economic development of a country.

Figure 12: Youth literacy rate for population aged 15–24, by urban rural and sex, 2000