

# Stepping Stones Beneficiaries

# Scope of the problem

- The education system in China is deeply unequal across social classes and the urban-rural divide. Students are presented with extremely different school options, which vary according to their location, residency status (hukou), and family situation.
- A child born into a low-income, rural, or migrant family has less chance of accessing a better standard primary and middle school and eventually accessing higher education than a child born into a wealthy or urban family.



# Beneficiaries of Stepping Stones China



The majority of Stepping Stones' beneficiaries are children under 18 years old who are disadvantaged in terms of access to quality education and resources\*. They are suffering at least one of the following disadvantages:

1. Children facing educational and institutional barriers in cities for reasons of household registration, and therefore enrolled in a school for migrant children - with lower educational standards than local public schools (i.e., higher class sizes, less qualified inexperienced teachers and fewer resources) - or enrolled into an extra-curricular program for migrant children run by partner NGOs.
2. Children in low-income households and therefore unable to access the extra-curricular educational resources that are accessible to the majority of children in middle and high-income families.

3. Children attending a school in a third-tier city or below (including rural counties/villages) with lower educational standards than in the cities.

4. Children who have been "left behind" by parents who have migrated away to work in other parts of China, and who live with other relatives in a third-tier city or below (including rural counties/villages) or in boarding school, often seeing their parents only once a year.

5. Children living in care homes.

6. Children with disabilities, e.g. autism.



# Education & Migration in China



While Stepping Stones serves a wide range of disadvantaged children from different locations and backgrounds (e.g., rural and urban children from low-income families, children from third-tier cities or below, and children with disabilities), the majority of them are children whose education has been negatively impacted by rural-urban migration in China. They are either (1) migrant children or (2) left-behind children.



# Migrant Children

**Number of migrant children in China in  
2020 (<18 yrs old):**

**71.09 million**

**Living with one or both parents:**

**53.29 million**

**Not living with either parent:**

**17.8 million**



National Bureau of Statistics of China, UNICEF China, UNFPA China (2023), 'What the 2020 Census Can Tell Us About Children in China: Facts and Figures'

# Migrant Children



## Who are migrant children in China?

They are the offspring of migrant workers who live with their parents in places other than where they have registered permanent residence. Although every migrant's story is unique, and some migrants have been very successful professionally and financially, most of them provide low-skilled labor for the construction, manufacturing, and service industries. In addition to being born into a relatively low-income family, many migrant children and youth face systemic institutional barriers in destination cities, of which the hukou system is the underlying cause.

## What is the “hukou” system?

The hukou system is China's household registration system. It records and differentiates people based on their place of origin. It also ties many social benefits to the location where your family is originally from. Despite ongoing reforms, the hukou system remains highly relevant to migrant children's education as it limits their access to local public schools in the destination cities, and channels many of them into lower-quality schools designated for children of migrant workers. The hukou system also strictly restricts admission to academic high schools which are not included in the compulsory education system in China.



# Migrant Children

## Education for migrant children in China

- While the situation varies greatly throughout Chinese cities and provinces, many migrant children and youths, even some of whose families have achieved financial security and are enrolled in private migrant schools, do not have access to regular public schools whose educational standards fall behind the urban public schools.
- Although the quality of schools for migrants has improved in recent years, especially in cities like Shanghai, research suggests that they are constantly outperformed by local public schools, due to a lack of resources, higher class sizes, and less qualified and experienced teachers.
- Other migrant children and youth are enrolled in public schools but need extra help with their schoolwork, which many of their parents are unable to provide.



# Left-behind Children

Number of left-behind children in China in  
2020 (<18 yrs old):

**66.93 million**

**Living with one or both parents:**

**39.85 million**

**Not living with either parent:**

**27.08 million**



National Bureau of Statistics of China, UNICEF China, UNFPA China (2023),  
'What the 2020 Census Can Tell Us About Children in China: Facts and Figures'



# Left-behind Children

## Who are left-behind children in China?

They are the offspring of migrant workers and are unable to go with their parents to the cities. They are left behind by one or both parents, and many of them are living with other family members or in boarding schools. Many of them see their parents only once per year during the Chinese New Year holiday.

## Education for left-behind children and youth in China

They are arguably the most disadvantaged of Stepping Stones' beneficiaries. Most of them attend either local rural schools or boarding schools, whose educational standards fall strongly behind the urban schools in China.

