



The effects of Chinese population policy on the labour market

Sanja Filipović¹  Jelena Ignjatović² 

ABSTRACT

Faced with high levels of poverty, China introduced its “one-child policy” in 1980 and began economic and systemic reforms that led to the country’s strong economic development. Thanks to the improvement in the average standard of living, certain socioeconomic aspects related to women’s employment, the pursuit of higher education, delays in childbirth, and the number of children have changed. These changes have not only reduced the number of children being born and led to population aging, but have also affected the labour market. The aim of this paper is to determine the effects of Chinese population policy on selected labour market indicators: labour force by age and sex in rural/urban areas, the labour force participation rate, and the unemployment rate. Research results from 2010 to 2020 show the growth of the labour force, while the unemployment rate has been growing since 2018. It is noticeable that the number of workers in the labour force is growing in cities, while it is declining in rural areas. On the other hand, the unemployment rate is lower in rural areas, while the growth of unemployment is evident in urban areas. The research shows that the long-term implementation of this population policy has resulted in a larger number of men, leading to greater participation of men in the labour force. Despite measures to improve the position of women at work, women’s social security is still not guaranteed, and it is more difficult for women to decide to expand their families. As China has ambitious plans for economic development, defining adequate population and social policies is crucial for their implementation.

KEYWORDS

China, population, policy, labour, market

¹ Faculty of Business,
Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

² Academy of Vocational
Studies, Department of
Agricultural and Business
Studies and Tourism,
Šabac, Serbia

Correspondence:

Sanja Filipović,
Faculty of Business,
Singidunum University,
Danijelova32, Belgrade,
Serbia

Email:

sfilipovic@singidunum.ac.rs

1 INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 20th century, all countries in the world recorded population growth (Feng, Cai and Baochang 2013). The total world population was 2.5 billion in 1950, 4.4 billion in 1980, and according to the last census in 2020, 7.7 billion (United Nations 2022b). The highest growth rates among the Chinese population were recorded from 1965 to 1970 (2.67%), after which a downward trend occurred. According to the latest data from 2015 to 2020, the current population growth rate is only 0.46%, and this trend is expected to continue into the future.

China is the world's most populous country, and after the Second World War recorded population growth from 554 million in 1950 to today's 1.4 billion¹ (United States Census Bureau 2022).

After the Second World War, China was an undeveloped agrarian country. Accelerated industrialisation during the 1950s resulted in the sudden abandonment of agriculture and the mass exodus of people to cities (Filipović and Ignjatović 2021a). A lack of workers to cultivate agricultural land amidst the country's otherwise underdeveloped agricultural production together with unfavourable weather conditions (floods and droughts) resulted in food shortages that led to mass starvation amongst the population. It is estimated that 3–7% of the Chinese population died of starvation from 1958 to 1961. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), economic recovery was not prioritised, so the economic crisis deepened.

¹ Followed by India with 1,389,637,446 residents (United States Census Bureau 2022)

Although the Chinese fertility rate² had a downward trajectory between 1965 and 1990, in response to high levels of poverty, China introduced a one-child policy in 1980 to further reduce fertility and slow population growth. At the same time, the nationalisation of agriculture weakened Chinese institutions, thus undermining the birth planning administration. The process of structural reforms and liberalisation of the economy took place in parallel, which led to the country's economic growth (Cai et al. 2002; Fang and Wang 2005; Antevski 2013). Although the stated goal of the policy was to improve people's quality of life (Perić and Filipović 2021), the policy was condemned by the global community over concerns that it violated sexual and reproductive rights and disrespected people's life choices to plan families.

The one-child policy was relaxed only in 2013 so that Chinese couples were allowed to have two children if at least one parent did not have any siblings. However, many couples who fell into this category decided not to have another child due to the high cost of living. Faced with the problem of an aging population, the Chinese Communist Party announced the abolition of the one-child policy at the end of 2015.

Just before the last Chinese census in 2020, it was speculated that birth restrictions could be lifted altogether. On the other hand, some experts believe that such a measure could potentially deepen the imbalances between rural and urban areas. It could mean

² The general fertility rate is the most common measure of fertility, which measures the number of live births in the geographical area in year per 1000 women of reproductive age (for the period 15–44 years) (The World Bank 2022).

that women, especially in expensive urban areas (cities such as Beijing and Shanghai), would delay or avoid childbirth, while women in the countryside would probably follow tradition by establishing large families. In addition, people in rural areas might be more willing to expand their families, which may increase poverty or create pressure on employment. Nevertheless, modern life trends and problems (e.g. young people's unwillingness to give birth, high costs of raising children in cities, insecure jobs, and lack of benefits and opportunities for absence based on maternity or paternity leave) discourage young people from giving birth. The census showed that China's population had grown at a lower rate than in previous decades, reaching a total of 1.4 billion inhabitants, while the country still has 34.9 million more men (51.2% of the population) than women. Meanwhile, the population between the ages of 15 and 59 has decreased by almost 7%, while the share of the population over the age of 60 has increased by more than 5% (AFP 2021).

The decrease in the birth rate has had a direct impact on the labour market, and the reduced supply of labour has led to a fall in the unemployment rate while also affecting the new working conditions. Thus, for example, the ratio of male and female workers within the labour force has changed, while working conditions in rural and urban China remain different. In modern times, more and more young women are deciding on further education and employment instead of starting a family earlier, while young Chinese people are facing the problem of overtime work in order to provide for their families.

As the census showed the shortcomings of the system, China's politburo, as the highest decision-making body of the Communist Party, in May 2021 announced that it would enable all Chinese couples to have three children. Thus ended the one-child policy (Wee 2021) under the pretence of implementing a national strategy in response to aging and changes in the age structure of the population (McDonnell 2021). Although the average standard of living has increased, changing socioeconomic factors (women's employment, the pursuit of higher education, and delaying childbirth) have had negative consequences for the labour market.

The aim of this paper is to determine the effects of Chinese population policy on selected labour market indicators from 2010 to 2020: labour force by age and sex in rural and urban areas, participation rate of different categories in the labour force, and unemployment rate by category of labour force. In addition to the introduction, the structure of the paper consists of three chapters. The first chapter analyses the evolution of population policy in China. The second chapter is based on the demographic picture of China, while the third chapter assesses the effects of population policy on the labour market. Finally, concluding remarks are given.

2 THE EVOLUTION OF POPULATION POLICY IN CHINA

After the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (Ping 2019), when Chinese population policy was first promoted, Chinese authorities encouraged families to have more children (White 2006), which resulted

in population growth shown in the 1954 census. As early as the following year, at the eighth Peoples' Congress, based on the Report on the Recommendations of Developing Economy in the Second Five-Year Plan and the Instructions on the Issue of Population Control, a birth control measure was proposed (Yang 2003), representing a turn in population policy. In 1962, the Central Committee and the State Council issued the Instructions on the Serious Promotion of Family Planning, which called for improved birth control in urban and densely populated rural areas. Shortly afterwards, in February 1965, the Family Planning Commission of the State Council held a conference to exchange experiences from individual Chinese districts, when the slogan "One is not less, two are perfect and three are more" appeared (Jiang et al. 2013).

The late 1950s and early 1960s were turbulent for the Chinese economy, and this was reflected in population policy (Chang 1992; Kaufman 1998). "The Great Leap Forward" was an economic and social campaign led by the Communist Party of China (1958–1962) that initiated the reconstruction of the country from an agrarian economy into a communist society through the formation of people's communes. It's believed there was a great Chinese famine in that period that is estimated to be the worst in human history (Smil 1999; Meng et al. 2015), with over 20 million people losing their lives (Harrison and Palumbo 2019). Shortly after the failed economic reform, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) followed as a socio-political movement that aimed to strengthen Chinese communism by eliminating remnants of capitalist and traditional elements and imposing the

ideologies of then-President Mao Zedong (Maoism)³ (Phillips 2016). Both historical periods deepened poverty even more, which had a direct effect on family planning. Systemic reforms were necessary at the time, as were active population policy measures to reduce poverty. The framework of the new population policy was defined in the 1970s, and in 1978, economic and systemic reforms officially began. At the time, China was approaching a population of billions. Jiang et al. (2013) believe that the development of Chinese population policy took place in three phases: 1970–1979 (when population control was not strict); 1980–1999 (policy of strict population control) and after 2000 (low birth rate policy).

In the first phase of the development of China's flexible population policy (1970–1979), it was decided that population growth and control (urban and suburban areas) must be firmly integrated into economic planning. This policy allowed two children per family unit. In the late 1970s, the goal was to quadruple annual income per capita by 2000, highlighting the potential need for constraint on population growth (Greenhalgh and Winkler 2005).

In 1979, the National Family Planning Commission⁴ initiated proposals to limit couples to one child, while state media outlets supported and promoted the idea. After the presentation of the Open Letter of the Central Committee in 1980, addressed to the members of the Communist Party and

³ Maoism is a popular name for a Marxist-Leninist ideology based on the communist teachings of the former Chinese president Mao Zedong.

⁴ The National Family Planning Commission was renamed to the Family Planning Commission (2003), and then to the National Health and Family Planning Commission (2013).

the Communist Youth League, on the issue of population growth control, the government began to implement measures that included limiting each family to one child (Goldman 2021), better known as the one-child policy. Thus began the second phase of the development of strict population policy in China (1980–1999). Policy formulation and implementation was localised. According to central government instructions, policy planning and implementation was under the control of local governments, especially provincial ones. In order to meet the social, economic and cultural goals of different regions, local governments were relatively flexible in implementing national population policy. Gu et al. (2007) believe that a rigorous implementation of the policy would result in no simple reproduction (1.465 children per woman), which according to Parant (2008) would affect the whole society.

Thus, the policy of forcing couples to have only one child was imposed. It was introduced by leader Deng Xiaoping in order to stop population growth and encourage economic development. In 1980, China had a billion inhabitants, which was twice as many as in 1950, when there were about 554 million inhabitants. In the same year (1980), Chinese provinces experimented with measures to control population growth, including providing additional meals for couples in Sichuan province who pledged to have only one child. Just two years later (1982), the National People's Congress adopted a new constitution that for the first time included birth control as the duty of every Chinese citizen (Reuters 1982). In this way, Chinese population trends over the years have largely been shaped by the one-child

policy, introduced to slow population growth. In addition to low fertility, this had broad effects on the Chinese economy and social development, and also produced side effects such as an imbalanced sex ratio at birth and rapid population aging. As a result, in the following decades, births (especially in rural areas) were not properly reported and there was a high rate of abortions of female foetuses, which affected the sex ratio in favour of male children.

Although the total fertility rate (births per woman) was considerably reduced (4.85 in the 1970s, 2.52 in the late 1980s, 1.83 in the 1990s, and 1.61 in the 2000s) (United Nations 2022c), the standard of living as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was still low (Banister 1984). The government saw a potential solution by further controlling population growth through the introduction of various population policy measures (Greenhalgh 2005; Guo et al. 2019). Since this policy has come into force, a large number of Chinese families who have failed to comply with the rules have faced fines, job losses, and sometimes forced abortions. The one-child policy itself has led to serious gender imbalances in the country, where the male population was higher by 30,835,000 in the early 1990s and 33,825,000 in the late 1990s (United Nations 2022a). The traditional preference for male children has led to the abandonment of large numbers of girls, who are placed in orphanages, or fall victim to sexually selective abortions or even female infanticide. This continued to cause problems for the "marriage market", especially for the male population, which had fewer socioeconomic resources.

The third phase of the development of Chinese population policy began after 2000 and is characterised by a low birth rate policy. An analysis of the 2000 census reveals that by that time, the fertility rate in China had fallen to 1.4–1.6 children per woman (Morgan et al. 2009). Despite that, in 2003, it became known to the public that in the province of Guangxi, where the regulations on family planning were strictly applied, parents had tried to sell their girls on the black market so they could have sons instead. It is estimated that as many as 80% of trafficked babies were girls (Rosenthal 2003). Decades of this policy disrupted gender relations, with the Chinese government saying some 400 million births were prevented, but despite concerns about demographic imbalances, the authorities were reluctant to end the one-child policy. Although Chinese authorities began easing measures on having more than one child in 2008 (Yardley 2008), there was still speculation and reports of forced sterilisation and abortions.

The preliminary results of the 2010 census reveal that the total fertility rate was 1.64 children per women, which is significantly below the level of simple reproduction (PCO 2012; United Nations 2022c), a phenomenon that is partly attributed to China's one-child policy. In March 2013, China abolished the Family Planning Commission, then established the National Health and Family Planning Commission. This step indicated a potential move away from the previous population policy. However, there was a further decline in fertility, which provoked even more criticism from many Chinese scientists, who agreed that new measures were needed. This was due to changes in

China's population policy from the initial strict control of population growth (1980s) to the over-stabilisation of low fertility (2010), then to the current population policies of "support and improvement", which have affected the national economy and social development (Jiang et al. 2013).

Given the fact that China had a population of about 1.39 billion in 2013 (United Nations 2019), the Chinese government relaxed the one-child policy for the first time in 35 years, allowing couples across the country to have two children only if one of the spouses was the only child in their family (Buckley 2013). However, since from May 2015 to May 2016, only 1.45 million couples reported having a second child, which was fewer than 15% of eligible couples (AFP 2021), it was announced that all married couples would be allowed to have two children (Buckley 2015). In an attempt to stop the rapid aging of the workforce, the abolition of the one-child policy was announced at the end of 2015, and the politics of two children was adopted. However, the constant decline in the birth rate in the country has not been reversed, which means that the new policy had a short-term effect and did not lead to a continuous increase in birth rates. The reason for that may be a social one, because generations of Chinese people have lived without brothers and sisters, and as such got used to small families. Smaller families cost less, and it seems many young Chinese people would rather give one child more opportunities than distribute the income to a larger number of children. As early as 2020, academics warned the Chinese government that decades of family planning initiatives had led to a sharp decline in popula-

tion, laying the groundwork for potential demographic, economic, and even political crises in the near future. They further stated that declining birth rates, along with rising life expectancy, meant that there would soon be too few workers to support a huge and aging population (Myers Lee et al. 2020).

At the end of 2020, a census was conducted showing that around 12 million babies were born in 2020 – a significant drop from the 18 million registered in 2016. This is the lowest number of births recorded since 1961 (McDonnell 2021; Wee 2021). Therefore, in May 2021, China's politburo, response to the change in the age structure of the population, announced that all Chinese couples would be able to have three children.

3 CHINA'S DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Since official demographic data was unreliable and incomplete, the real effects of Chinese population policy (Aird 1982) could not be fully understood over the years. Population policy measures primarily aimed to limit population growth (Wu et al. 2008), but demographers predicted side effects as early as the mid-1980s (Bongaarts and Greenhalgh 1985) in the form of potential labour shortages, rapid population aging, and disruption of the ratio between males and females (Greenhalgh and Winkler 2005; Cai and Zang 2013).

Sharping (2003: 110) noted that from 1979 to 1999, the share of women who used contraception during repro-

ductive age increased from 60–70% to 80–90%. The same author noted that there is a difference in the application of population policy measures in rural and urban parts of China because birth control in rural areas is more a consequence of administrative pressure than spontaneous changes caused by economic growth and development. In addition, the list of administrative penalties for non-compliance with measures has been steadily expanding, resulting in an increase in the number of women giving birth in hidden places, as well as the non-reporting of female children, falsification of documents, and false death records. Cai (2010) estimates that by the 2000s, the Chinese population was deprived of 100–400 million births, which, according to Greenhalgh and Winkler (2005), created enormous social problems and human suffering.

The total Chinese population in 1950 was 546.815 million. From 1950 to 2020, the Chinese population grew by as many as 865.305 million inhabitants to reach a total of 1,412.120 million inhabitants in 2020 (Figure 1). However, the number of children born per year in the same period decreased sharply: in 1950 it was 20,232,000 births per year, while in 2020 it was only 12,020,000 (National Bureau of Statistic of China 2022). According to forecasts of the high fertility variant from 2020 to 2100, the Chinese population should increase by only 143,663,000 people, which means that in 2050 the population will amount to 1,515.346 million, and in 2100 to 1,582.986 million people (United Nations 2022b).

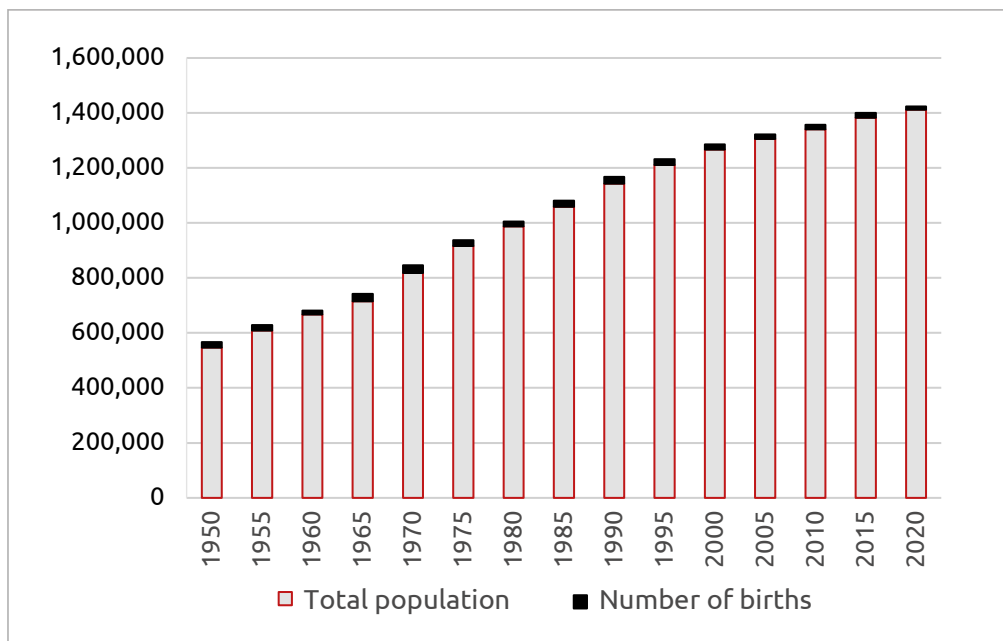


Figure 1 Total population and number of births in China (thousands), 1950–2020

Source: National Bureau of Statistic of China (2022)

Differences in the implementation of local family planning policy are manifested at the district level, where families – or more precisely women of reproductive age – have influence on the implementation of special policies (Chen et al. 2020). The total fertility rate (TFR) in China averaged 6.1 in 1950 and peaked at 6.3 in 1965. Just a decade, the TFR had been halved, amounting to just 3 in 1975. The subsequent decline resulted in a TFR of 1.83 in 1990 (Merli and Morgan 2011). However, in the last 30-year period from 1990 to 2020, the rate was constant: 1.7 on average (United Nations 2022c), implying that China had entered a period of below-replacement fertility (Figure 2). According to Retherford et al. (2005), a TFR of 1.4–1.6 is too low given the level before the introduction of the one-child policy, while Zeng (2007) assumes that the universal preference

for two children in China has set the minimum TFR level at 2.0.

According to the United Nations (2019), in 1950 the gender ratio was slightly in favour of men – 1:1.08 – i.e. there were 21,060,000 more men than women (287,740,000 men compared to 266,679,000 women). Over time, this difference has increased in favour of men. In 2020, there were 37,171,000 more men than women (738,247,000 men and 701,076,000 women). The reason for this was the one-child policy, which resulted in the creation of this imbalance, as millions of Chinese couples were determined that their only child should be a son (Denyer and Gowen 2018).

The close link between socio-economic development and fertility is evident and can be seen through the relationship between the TFR and the standard of living measured by GDP per capita. The relationship between these

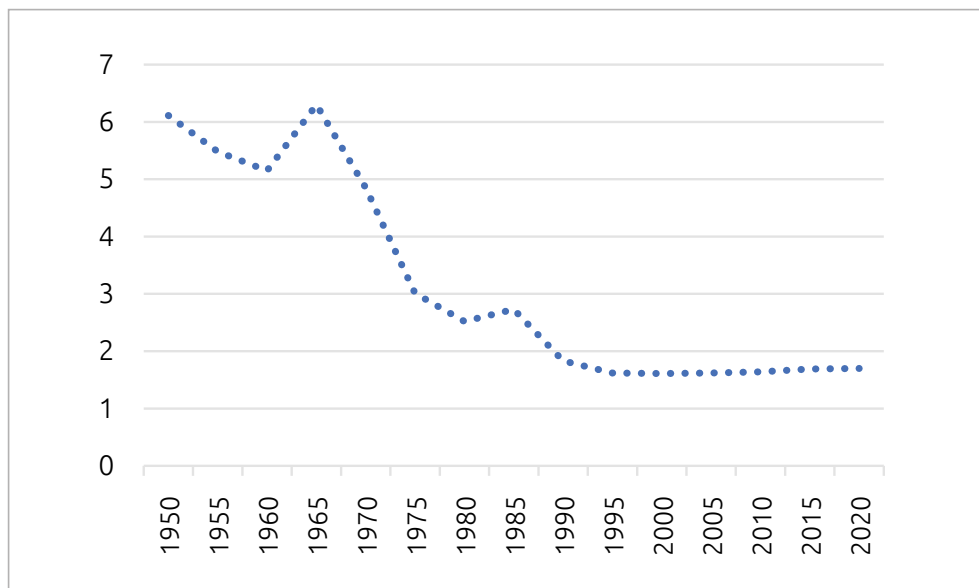


Figure 2 Total fertility rate (TFR), 1950–2020
 Source: United Nations (2022c)

two variables, defined by a simple regression model, is so robust that little has changed since 1975 (Cai 2010). The decline in population has contributed to an increase in GDP per capita, which in 1970 was only \$112. The highest

growth was achieved from 1970 to 2010, when GDP per capita was \$4,447. The trend of rising living standards continued in the following years, reaching \$10,229 per capita in 2020 (United Nations 2022d) (Figure 3).

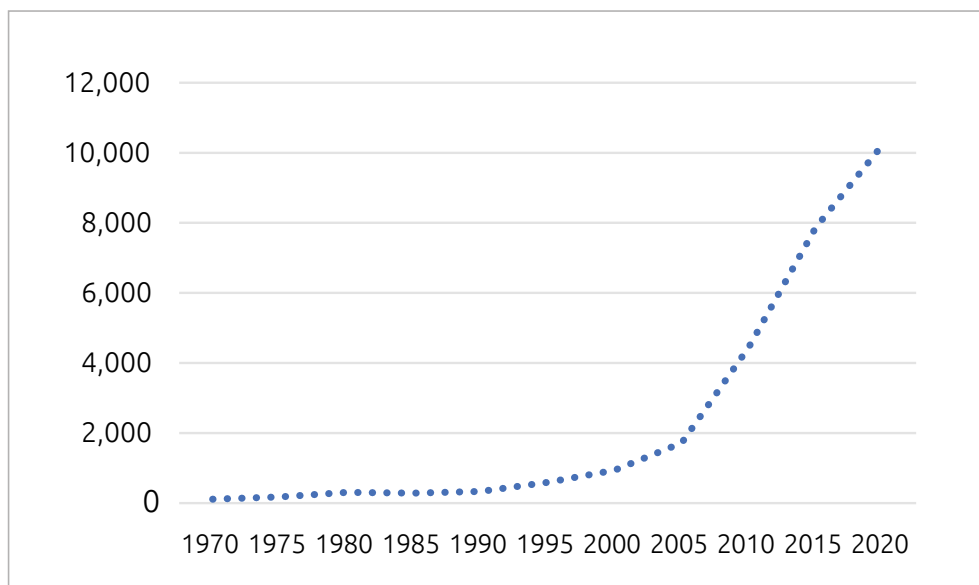


Figure 3 GDP per capita in China (\$), 1970–2020
 Source: United Nations (2022d)

The rise in living standards in China has changed the quality of people's lifestyles. The Human Development Index (HDI), as a measure of quality of life and wellbeing (Engineer et al. 2008), is a summary measure of average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: long and healthy life, education, and a decent standard of living (UNDP 2016). China has a high level of human development, where according to the last HDI published in 2020, it was ranked 85th out of 189 countries (UNDP 2020). From 2014 to 2019, China advanced by 12 places, so it can be expected that in the coming period, if this trend continues, it will join the group of countries with very high human development. The average annual growth of China's HDI from 1990 to 2019 was 1.47%. The highest annual growth of the HDI was achieved from 1990 to 2000 (1.65%) and 2000 to 2010 (1.74%), while from 2010 to 2019 the growth of the HDI was 0.95%.

Changes in quality of lifestyle have affected family planning and delayed childbirth. The one-child policy has changed women's goals in China, with many women shifting their focus from family planning to pursuing future careers (stable jobs and financial security), contributing to lower birth rates. Namely, young Chinese women, in the pursuit of improving their quality of life, now mostly decide to start a family after the age of 30, i.e. once they're already employed (Vanderhorst 2018). On the other hand, many young Chinese people accept overtime work (Allen 2021), which has become endemic, so modern "dilemmas in the workplace" for fathers who go on paternity leave often stand out, because there are no basic reproductive benefits.

4 THE LABOUR MARKET IN CHINA

The dramatic decline in the TFR from 1965 to 1990 directly affected the workforce. Thus, the peak share of the working-age population in China was reached in 2011 (59.8%). In the observed period from 2010 to 2020, the total labour force grew, but in 2020 there was a decline in the labour force. Observing data by age and sex, there was a decline in both the male and female labour force among people aged 15 to 24, while in those aged 25+, the growth of both populations is evident. Figure 4 gives a comparative overview of labour force participation by age categories (15–24 and 25+ years of age) in rural and urban areas, where labour force growth in urban areas and decline in rural areas are noticeable. However, if the labour force participation rate (LFPR) is observed in the same period, it can be noticed that for those aged 25+, participation is 14% higher, while in the population aged 15–24 it is 17% higher in rural areas than in urban areas. According to the same categories, the share of women in the labour force in the 15–24 age group is 15.8% higher in rural areas than in urban areas, while in the 25+ population it is 12% higher. Unlike females, the LFPR in the male labour force among those aged 15–24 is 18.1% higher in rural areas than in urban areas, while in the 25+ population it is 14.5% higher. This suggests that the LFPR is growing markedly in rural areas, while declining in urban areas. The reduction in the labour force has caused a lack of labour profiles in the labour market and an increase in wages (Li et al. 2012), especially in coastal regions where the participation of the young population is higher.

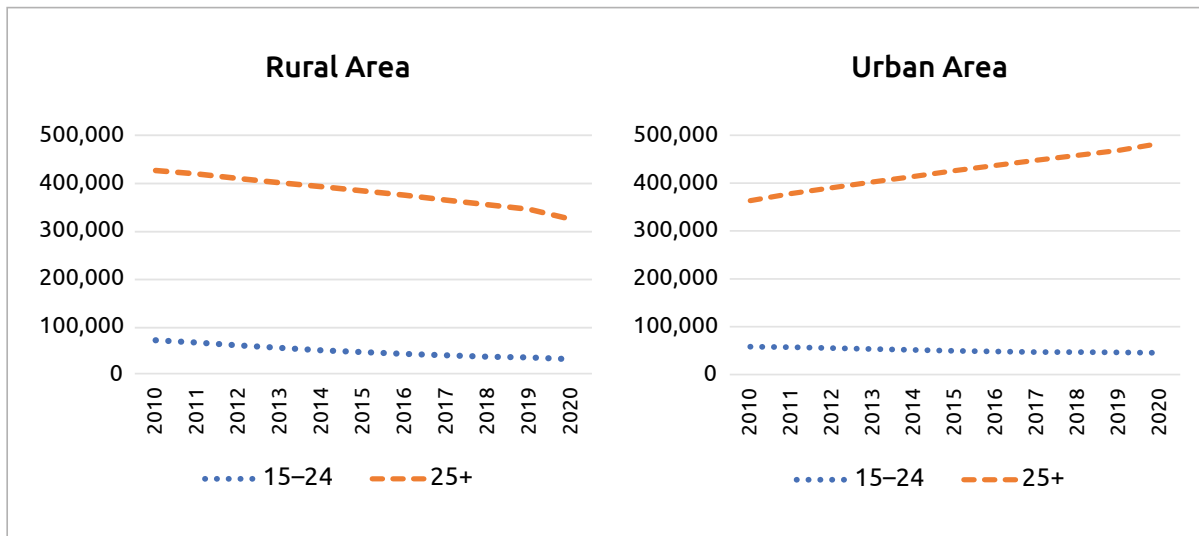


Figure 4 Labour force by age in rural/urban areas (thousands), 2010–2020

Source: ILOSTAT (2022)

The evolution of the working age population is also influenced by the unbalanced gender ratio, since the size of the male population (which otherwise has a higher percentage of employment) has grown (Angrist 2002). For example, considering data from 2010 to 2020, the LFPR of the female workforce in the population aged 25+ compared to the male population was

15% lower, while for the 15–24 population, the LFPR was 6.8% lower. According to the latest data (ILOSTAT 2022), the LFPR of the female population aged 25+ in 2020 was 64.8%, while for the male population it was as high as 78.6%. In the same year, the LFPR for the female population aged 15–24 was 42.6%, and for the male population 51.3% (Figure 5).

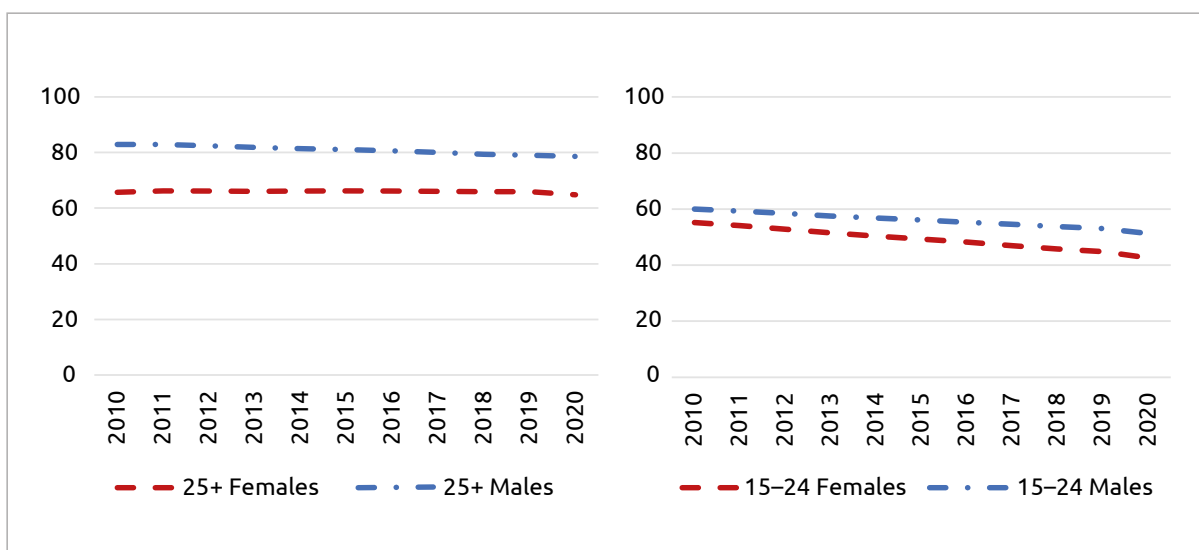


Figure 5 LFPR by age and sex (%), 2010–2020

Source: ILOSTAT (2022)

There are a number of empirical studies about the negative effects of fertility on the supply of female labour (Borjas 2000). He and Zhu (2015) found that fertility has relatively little effect on the supply of female labour in urban parts of China, while Li et al. (2015) show that reducing fertility does not increase the supply of female labour in rural parts of China. Some experts believe that a new policy of family planning without limiting the number of children would not contribute to GDP growth by stimulating labour supply, while Becker and Lewis (1973) suggested that reducing the number of children based on higher standards would provide greater opportunities (e.g. education) for each child born. According to Wang et al. (2016), China's family planning policy has led to a reduction in the number of children, but has affected the quality of education. Thus, the average number of years of education (up to the age of 25) increased by about 50%, i.e. from 5.8 to 8.9 years. Rosenzweig and Zhang (2009) analysed the impact of the number of children born on the quality of life in rural areas, where the public education system is otherwise poorer. Studying the effects of the one-child policy, the authors found empirical data indicating that the effects are greatest in terms of increasing the probability of attending college and the number of children attending school, the quality of health, and the level of school grades. Nevertheless, Qian (2009) believes that the birth of a second child increases the likelihood of enrolment of the first-born child in rural China, because children from the same family can share textbooks and clothes.

The Chinese government has implemented a number of policies to

promote women's employment in the public sector (Pan 2002; Ma 2011). Women's participation in the total labour force (LFPR of 63.5% in 2019) is higher in China than in other Asian countries. This might be a consequence of constitutional rights under which women in China are considered equal to men in all spheres of life (Yu and Liu 2010). According to Disgupta et al. (2015), the Chinese government, after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1978), began providing measures designed to increase women's participation in the workforce through the creation of childcare and social security systems.

The period after 1990 was very important for the development of gender equality in China. Thus, in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, with the aim of giving women the right to political, economic, cultural, and social decision-making. The National Program for Women's Development in China (1995–2000) was adopted immediately afterwards to achieve gender equality in social and economic spheres. The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests (1992) defined the equal rights of women in the spheres of politics, education, labour, property, personal rights, and the right to marriage and family. This law clearly emphasised the principle of "equal pay for equal work" in order to protect women's employment, benefits, and income. The China Employment Promotion Law has been in force since 2008, prohibiting discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. In 2011, the 12th Five-Year Plan of China (2011–15) was defined, with the aim of maintaining

gender equality in employment, health-care, social aging, poverty reduction, and legal aid for women. In the same year, the National Program for Women's Development in China (2011–2020) confirmed that discrimination existed against women in employment, education, and earnings in relation to men. For this reason, in this national program, women's social security was improved through the topic entitled "women and social security," with the aim of strengthening women's social security scheme (maternity, health, and pension insurance, unemployment insurance, and occupational injuries). Based on this, Disgupta et al. (2015) found an increase in women's participation in the categories of basic medical insurance, unemployment insurance, injury insurance, and maternity insurance. The same authors stated that the improvement of women's social security has resulted in the growth of socially inclusive women in urban areas, as well as the increasing participation of women in the development of social security schemes. The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) insists on employment that focuses on improving skills and talents and appropriate compensation for all employed women and men, without discrimination.

However, despite these measures, Ma and Zhang (2019) showed that increasing the number of children in Chinese families has reduced the likelihood that the mother will become a regular worker and will be ready to have a second or third child. Since grandparents play a significant role in raising children, China's plans to gradually postpone retirement over the next few decades could significantly affect the labor supply and earnings of young highly educated women, especially

those in urban areas (Yu et al. 2018). As China's working age population shrinks, the Chinese government has decided to gradually postpone retirement. The law prescribes a retirement age (60 for men, 55 for women in the public sector and 50 for women working in factories), which will be gradually raised until it reaches the level of advanced economies (65 or more) by 2040 (The Economist 2021).

The shortage of skilled labour is exacerbated by technological pressures, and the mismatch between jobs and skills is becoming a major problem within the labour market. This discrepancy is also present amongst young people, who are a vulnerable group everywhere in the world because they lack experience. In China, the general unemployment rate has increased since 2018, reaching 5% in 2020, which is a low level of unemployment (for both Chinese and Western standards) and close to the so-called natural rate of unemployment. The youth unemployment rate (15–24 years) was three times higher than the national unemployment rate (ILOSTAT 2022). In the observed period from 2010–2020, the unemployment rate for the population aged 15–24 was 20.9%, while it was 7.3% for the population aged 25+. On the other hand, the unemployment rate in urban areas compared to rural areas was 1.4% higher for the population aged 25+ and 3.7% higher for the population aged 15–24 (Figure 6). However, youth unemployment accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data for 2020, the unemployment rate for the population aged 15–24 was 23.3%, while it was 8.1% for the population aged 25+. In 2020, the unemployment rate in rural areas for the population aged 15–24

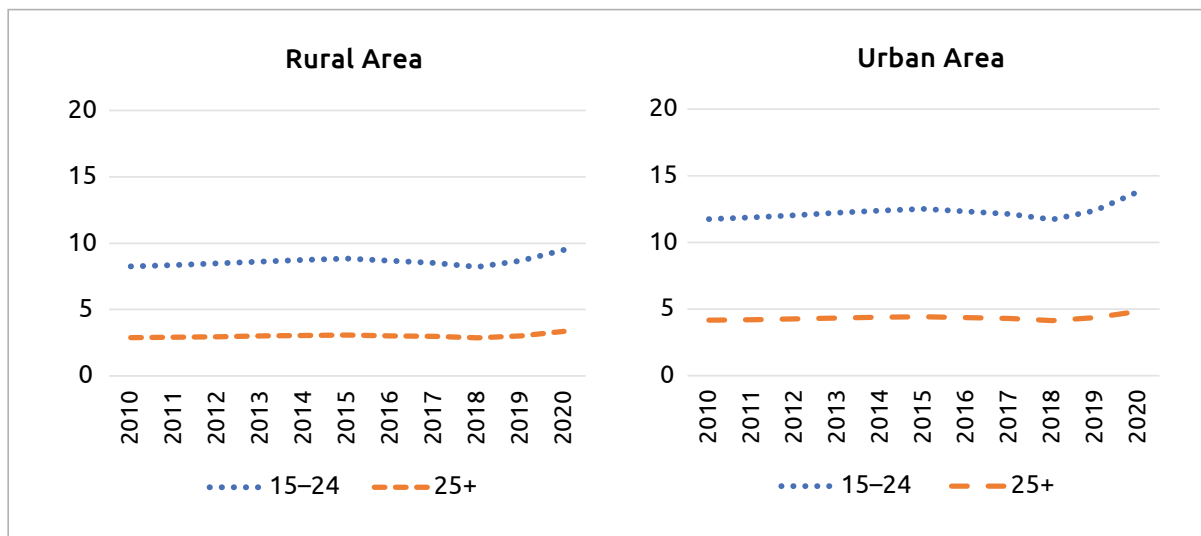


Figure 6 Unemployment rate by rural and urban area (%), 2010–2020

Source: ILOSTAT (2022)

was 9.5%, while it was 3.4% for the population aged 25+. In urban areas, the unemployment rate was 13.8% for the population aged 15–24 and 4.8% for the population aged 25+. In order to reduce the youth unemployment rate, the government has worked to improve vocational education. The result is evident in an increase in people’s average years of education, from 10.8 to 11.3 years (Bloomberg Equality 2021).

According to data for 2020, the sectors that employ the most labour in China are agriculture (47.7%), industry (28.7%), and services (23.6%) (Textor 2021). China has 170 million skilled workers, but among the total employed population, only 7% are highly skilled (about 48 million) (Ke and Li 2021). Currently, the biggest problem is the lack of skilled labour in the manufacturing sector. It is estimated that by 2025, there will be a shortage of about 30 million workers in the manufacturing sector and 10 million in other jobs (Nulimaimai-

ti 2022). The shortage of manpower will be even more pronounced as the high-tech industry develops. In the development strategy entitled “Made in China 2025”, China defined its goal is to become the world’s leading manufacturing power by 2049 (Filipović and Ignjatović 2021b). With the development of advanced technology, China is gradually using more and more domestic instead of foreign technology, which will create additional jobs. The biggest deficit of workers will be in the manufacturing industry, i.e. the automotive industry and the clothing industry. Demand is high not only for engineers, but also for skilled workers. According to the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), 55 million jobs are expected to be created in cities and the unemployment rate should be limited to 5.5%, with employment policy becoming the highest priority of Chinese economic policy. This is especially important because of the pressure to reduce inequality, but also to improve workers’ rights, especially in the tech-

nology industry, where overtime work is particularly problematic (The State Council the People's of Republic of China 2021). Despite these problems, it is important to emphasise that China has a huge labour force in rural areas, where as much as 47.7% of the labour force is employed in agriculture, where productivity is up to three times lower than in industry (Gollin et al 2014; Wu et al. 2022). Therefore, it can be expected that the continuation of migration to urban areas during the 2020s and 2030s will significantly alleviate the problems of the shortage of certain labour profiles that the country is facing (Krugman 2021).

5 CONCLUSION

Faced with high levels of poverty, China introduced a one-child policy in 1980 with the aim of reducing fertility and slowing population growth. Although the goal of the policy was to improve the quality of life, the policy was condemned by the global community, who argued that it violated sexual and reproductive rights and failed to respect people's life choices to plan their own families. The one-child policy was relaxed only in 2013, when Chinese couples were allowed to have two children, only if at least one parent didn't have siblings of their own. Despite that, many couples in that category decided against taking that step due to the high cost of raising children. At the end of 2015, as a response to the aging population, the abolition of the one-child policy was announced, meaning that couples would be allowed to have two children. Then in May 2021, it was announced that all Chinese couples

would be allowed to have up to three children. In this way, the one-child policy was completely abolished under the pretence of actively responding to aging and changes in the age structure of the population in China.

However, declining birth rates have caused changes in the labour market. Based on the analysis of empirical data from 2010 to 2020, several conclusions might be drawn. First, although the overall number of participants in the labour force increased during the observed period, an increase in the unemployment rate has been noticeable since 2018. Secondly, it is noticeable that the number of labour force participants in cities is growing, while in rural areas it is declining. Hence, the unemployment rate is lower in rural areas, while unemployment is evident in urban areas. Third, the long-term implementation of population policy has resulted in a larger male than female population in China, which has also affected the gender structure of the workforce. Fourth, despite measures to improve the position of women at work, women's social security is still not guaranteed, making it more difficult for them to decide to expand their families, especially in rural areas.

The long-term application of the one-child policy has undoubtedly had effects on the labour market. The further development of China will be conditioned by resolving the distortions in the labour market, i.e. defining adequate measures of social and employment policy. The country's strategic plans to take a leading role in high-tech production require an urgent solution to the lack of both skilled and highly skilled workers.

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How to cite: Filipović, S., & Ignjatović, J. (2023). The effects of Chinese population policy on the labour market. *Stanovništvo*, 61(1), 69–89. <https://doi.org/10.2298/STNV220609003F>

<https://doi.org/10.2298/STNV220609003F>

Uticaj kineske populacione politike na tržište radne snage

PROŠIRENI SAŽETAK

Suočena sa problemom visokog nivoa siromaštva, Kina je 1980. godine uvela „politiku jednog deteta” i započela sistemske privredne reforme koje su dovele do snažnog privrednog razvoja zemlje. Unapređenjem prosečnog životnog standarda promenjeni su i određeni socioekonomski aspekti koji se odnose na zaposlenje žena, težnju za višim obrazovanjem i odlaganje rađanja i broj dece. Te promene ne samo da su uticale na smanjen broj rođene dece i starenje stanovništva, nego su se odrazile i na tržište rada. Kako je dugi niz godina prikupljanje zvaničnih demografskih podataka bilo nepouzđano i nepotpuno, stvarni efekti višedecenijske populacione politike na tržište rada nisu se mogli u potpunosti sagledati. Pa ipak, evidentan trend smanjenja ukupne stope rađanja ukazao je na problem starenja nacije i nedostatak radne snage, što je dovelo do toga da se 2013. godine parovima prvi put dozvoli da, pod određenim uslovima, mogu imati po dvoje dece. Međutim, kako mera nije dala efekte, vlada je 2015. godine ukinula „politiku jednog deteta”. Ograničavajući se na period 2010–2020. godine, cilj istraživanja je da utvrdi efekte kineske populacione politike na izabrane pokazatelje tržišta rada: radna snaga po godinama i polu u ruralnim i urbanim sredinama, stopa učešća različitih kategorija u radnoj snazi i stopa nezaposlenosti po kategorijama. Rezultati istraživanja za posmatrani period (2010–2020) pokazuju rast radne snage, dok od 2018. godine raste stopa nezaposlenosti. Primetno je da raste broj radne snage u gradovima, dok u ruralnim sredinama opada. S druge strane, nezaposlenost je niža u ruralnim sredinama, dok je u urbanim sredinama evidentan rast nezaposlenosti. Istraživanje je pokazalo da je dugogodišnja primena populacione politike rezultirala većim brojem muške populacije, odnosno većim učešćem muškaraca u radnoj snazi i takav trend će se nastaviti. Uprkos merama za unapređenje položaja žena na radu, još uvek socijalna sigurnost žena nije zagarantovana, te se žene teže odlučuju na proširenje porodice. Kako Kina ima ambiciozne planove u ekonomskom razvoju, definisanje adekvatne populacione i socijalne politike je ključno za njihovu realizaciju. Nedostatak radne snage će biti još izraženiji kako se bude razvijala visokotehnološka industrija, jer će naročito nedostajati visokokvalifikovana radna snaga. Kina ima 170 miliona kvalifikovanih radnika, ali među ukupno zaposlenom populacijom samo 7% je visokokvalifikovanih radnika. Trenutno najveći problem je nedostatak kvalifikovane radne snage u proizvodnom sektoru, a očekuje se najveći deficit radnika u prerađivačkoj industriji, odnosno automobilskoj industriji.

KLJUČNE REČI

Kina, populacija, politika, radna snaga, tržište rada