

No Looming Baby Boom in China

By staff reporter LU RUCAI

YANG Wenzhuang, director of the primary level family planning guidance department of the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC), has announced that the whole country is preparing to implement the new birth policy of allowing two children for families in which either parent is an only child. The policy is expected to come into force in some provinces in the first quarter of 2014.

Vice Minister of the NHFPC Wang Pei'an commented that the policy adjustment would not lead to a sharp increase of yearly births; by 2020, the population will be below 1.43 billion, peaking at less than 1.5 billion, far behind the country's long-term projection.

The national plans concerning food production and fundamental public

service resources are formulated on the basis of the population of 1.43 billion estimated to inhabit China by 2020 and 1.5 billion by 2033. It is predicted that after the modification of the policies, by 2015 the population will be less than 1.38 billion.

Family Planning not One-Child Policy

Many outside observers have misunderstood Chinese family planning to mean that a couple may have one child only. In fact, this is not the case; there are many exceptions.

Prior to the recent policy adjustment, China relaxed its birth control policy to allow couples to have two children if both parents are the only child in their families. In fact, before that, apart from rural dwellers in the six provinces and cities of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Sichuan

and Chongqing, rural inhabitants of 19 provinces and autonomous regions including Hebei and Inner Mongolia may have a second child if the first one is a girl. Furthermore, in Hainan, Yunnan, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang, rural residents are generally allowed to have two children.

China's birth policy has been lenient among ethnic minority groups. If a minority group has a population of below 10 million, two children may be born per family. In some regions certain groups of ethnic farmers and herdsmen are allowed to have three children, including those in such regions as Qinghai and Ningxia and ethnic couples with two girls in regions like Hainan and Inner Mongolia. Minority groups with even scarcer populations in Heilongjiang and rural ethnic couples in the border villages of Yunnan can also have three children.



A baby boy was born at 0:00 am on January 1, 2014 at Beijing Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital.

More Relaxed Policy in Tibet

The family planning policy is more lenient in Tibet Autonomous Region. Urban residents may have two children while for Tibetans and other minorities with small populations there is no limit on the number of children allowed. The outcome of these more relaxed rules was evidenced in the sixth national population census of 2010, when the average number of family members was shown to be 4.23 people per family in Tibet, topping the whole country's average of 3.1.

In 1985, the policy allowing couples where both parents are the only child of their families to have two children was trialed in Zhejiang Province. By 2011, the policy had covered the whole country.

However, since the easing of the birth policy, intentions to have a second child have hardly prevailed. According to a study by the Family Planning Bureau of Guangzhou Municipality, out of 24,420 families registered in Guangzhou that were eligible to have a second child, only 313 (1.28 percent) of them chose to.

Balanced Population Development

NHFPC Vice Minister Wang Pei'an remarked at the World Family Summit held in Berlin, Germany on December 3, 2013 that in recent decades non-traditional family types are emerging, with DINKs (Double Income, No Kids), single-parent families and one-member

families on the rise. The family's conventional functions of marriage, birth and taking care of elders have been weakened.

Wang said that China's new policy allowing a second child if either spouse in a couple is an only child is a big adjustment and improvement towards the changing status of the Chinese population. It is expected to reduce the aging population rate, improve families' ability to overcome risks and promote China's long-term and balanced population development.

Predictable Increment

Zhai Zhenwu, head of the School of Sociology and Population Studies at Renmin University of China, believes that the significance of the adjustment of the family planning policy is that people are given a choice – they can decide whether they want to have more children or not.

However, facts show that choice does not automatically trigger action. According to data from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, in 2011, 92 percent of newborns registered in Shanghai were the first child. The birth rate of a second child in Shanghai's urban areas was 7.08 percent, and in its suburbs – Songjiang, Qingpu and Fengxian – only 8.63, 10.45 and 9.60 percent respectively.

NHFPC studies also show that birth trends are restricted by many factors such as housing, the costs of raising a child, and strains on time and energy. Moreover, the proportion of couples that fit the new policy is small. It's expected that China will see a newborn population increase of about 2 million yearly, which will not pose considerable pressure on China's food supply, education system, health provision, employment chances and other public services.

According to the China Population Association, the new policy will bring China a 22 million-strong demographic dividend. By 2030, the working population (aged 15-59) will increase from 875 million to 877 million. However, whether the dividend is awarded depends on how many eligible families exercise their new right under the new policy. ■



The latest adjustment to the family planning policy is expected to address the decline in China's working-age population and improve the ability of families to overcome risks.

Primary School Enrollment Rate

Year	Total Number of Children (million)	Proportion in the Total Population (%)	Primary School Enrollment Rate (%)
1953	236	39.2	50.3
1964	320	44.3	71.1
1982	410	39.7	93.2
1990	383	33	97.8
2000	345	26.6	99.1
2010	279	22.8	99.7

From China's Six National Censuses