

## China to end one-child policy and allow two

China has decided to end its decades-long one-child policy, the state-run Xinhua news agency reports.

Couples will now be allowed to have two children, it said, citing a statement from the Communist Party.

The controversial policy was introduced nationally in 1979, to slow the population growth rate.

It is estimated to have prevented about 400 million births. However concerns at China's ageing population led to pressure for change.

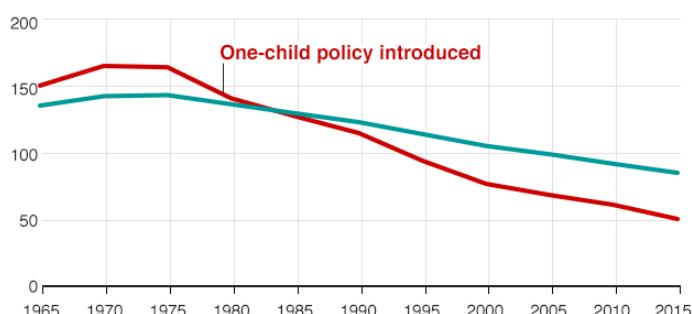
Couples who violated the one-child policy faced a variety of punishments, from fines and the loss of employment to forced abortions.

Over time, the policy has been relaxed in some provinces, as demographers and sociologists raised concerns about rising social costs and falling worker numbers.

### Fewer children and young people

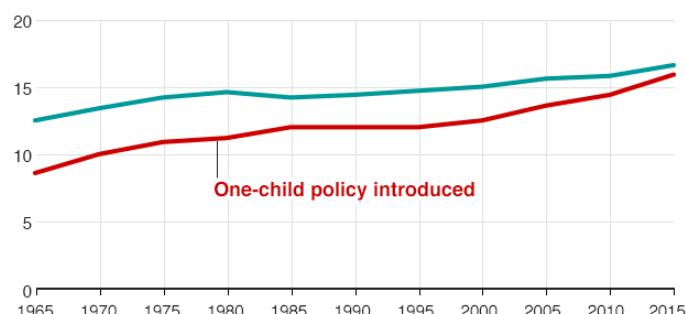
Children and young people (0-24) as a percentage of working age population (25-64)

— China  
— World average



### Population getting older

Older people (65+) as a percentage of working age population (25-64)



Source: United Nations Population Division

BBC

The decision to allow families to have two children was designed "to improve the balanced development of population" and to deal with an aging population, according to the statement from the Community Party's Central Committee **carried by the official Xinhua News Agency** (in Chinese) on Thursday.

Currently about 30% of China's population is over the age of 50. The total population of the country is around 1.36 billion.

The Communist Party began formally relaxing national rules two years ago, allowing couples in which at least one of the pair is an only child to have a second child.

### China's one-child policy

Introduced in 1979, the policy meant that many Chinese citizens - **around a third**, China claimed in 2007 - could not have a second child without incurring a fine

In rural areas, families were allowed to have two children if the first was a girl

Other exceptions included ethnic minorities and - since 2013 - couples where at least one was a single child

Campaigners say the policy led to forced abortions, female infanticide, and the under-reporting of female births

It was also implicated as a cause of China's gender imbalance

### What was China's one-child policy?

Correspondents say that despite the relaxation of the rules, many couples may opt to only have one child, as one-child families have become the social norm.

Critics say that even a two-child policy will not boost the birth rate enough, the BBC's John Sudworth reports.

And for those women who want more than two children, nor will it end the state's insistence on the right to control their fertility, he adds.

"As long as the quotas and system of surveillance remains, women still do not enjoy reproductive rights," Maya Wang of Human Rights Watch told AFP.

I lost two siblings - by Juliana Liu, BBC News Hong Kong correspondent



Image caption

The BBC's Juliana Liu, pictured with her family.

I was born in 1979, the year the one-child policy was implemented. And even then, I wasn't supposed to be born.

In my parents' work unit, there were also quotas for babies. By the time my mother announced her pregnancy, the quotas were all used up for the year. But kind-hearted officials decided to look the other way and allowed my birth. My would-be siblings were less lucky.

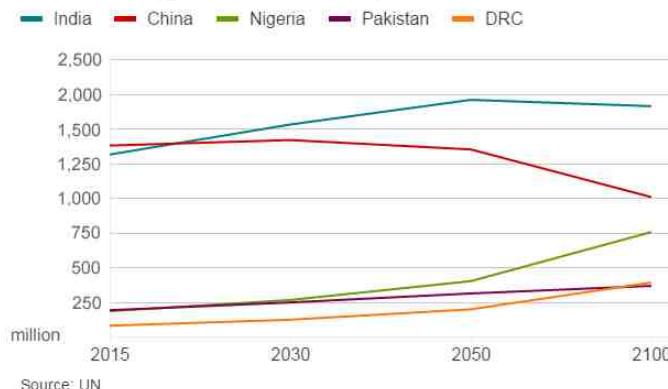
As a result of the policy, my mother had to endure two abortions. Even today, she talks about 'Number Two' and 'Number Three' and what they might have been like.

Writing in **The Conversation**, Stuart Gietel-Basten, associate professor of social policy at the University of Oxford, says the reform will do little to change China's population and is instead a "pragmatic response to an unpopular policy that made no sense".

The announcement in China came on the final day of a summit of the Communist Party's policy-making Central Committee, known as the fifth plenum. The party also announced growth targets and its next five year plan.

### Fastest growing populations

#### Countries driving global population change



## China's birth rate won't be dramatically affected by end of one-child policy

Demographers say many women in modern China more concerned about careers than having a large family.

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29 October 2015

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All families in China will now be allowed to have two children if they wish.

China's Communist Party is abandoning its controversial one-child policy — but demographers think that the nation's low birth rate is unlikely to dramatically increase as a result.

All couples in China will in future be allowed to have two children, not one, the Communist Party announced on 29 October. "From a human rights perspective this is very good news," says Patrick Gerland, a demographer with the United Nations (UN) population division in New York. "But it will hardly have a major long-term effect on population growth in modern China, where many women are now more concerned about jobs and careers than is reconcilable with having a large family."

The one child-rule was introduced in 1979 in order to stop excessive population growth, at a time when China's society was far less urbanized than it is today, and women had more than 3 children on average. It is thought to have prevented almost half a billion births in a nation that now numbers 1.4 billion. Still, it had been relaxed in recent years: couples in which one partner came from a one-child family were entitled to have a second child if they wanted, for example.

The ending of the one-child rule was not unexpected, experts say. Low fertility rates in hia countries such as Japan and Germany are raising concerns over mounting costs of social welfare and health systems, and China's decision seems to have been prompted by similar worries.

#### A slow birth-rate increase

But the policy-change alone will not make much difference to birth rates, demographers think. "The UN has already been projecting a small and slow increase in China's fertility rates over the coming decades, and this news makes this even more likely to happen. The increase is not likely to be large, though," says Adrian Raftery, a population statistician at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Chinese women currently give birth to an average 1.55 children over their lifetime – fertility rates that are only slightly higher than those of nations such as Germany (1.39) and Japan (1.4), according to the latest UN estimates. Current UN projections have China's birth rate increasing to 1.75 by mid-century.

"There are just too many constraints in terms of housing and education for most Chinese couples to have more than two children," says Gerland. "In Taiwan, where no one-child policy has ever existed, relatively few couples opt to even have a second child."

UN experts estimate that the world population, currently about 7 billion, is continuing to grow but at a slowing pace: it may reach up to 12 billion by 2100. But according to statistically refined projections, 21st century population growth will be limited to Africa, where fertility rates are still two to three times higher than on all other continents.

