



Technical Assistance Report

Project Number: 55026-001
Knowledge and Support Technical Assistance (KSTA)
September 2021

People's Republic of China: Research to Strengthen the Policy Framework for Childcare Services

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Asian Development Bank

CURRENCY EQUIVALENTS

(as of 17 August 2021)

Currency unit	–	yuan (CNY)
CNY1.00	=	\$0.1544
\$1.00	=	CNY6.4747

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	–	Asian Development Bank
CPS	–	country partnership strategy
GDP	–	gross domestic product
OECD	–	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRC	–	People’s Republic of China
TA	–	technical assistance
UNICEF	–	United Nations Children’s Fund

NOTE

In this report, “\$” refers to United States dollars.

Vice-President	Ahmed M. Saeed, Operations 2
Director General	M. Teresa Kho, East Asia Department (EARD)
Director	Sangay Penjor, Urban and Social Sectors Division (EASS), EARD
Team leader	Karin Schelzig, Principal Social Sector Specialist, EASS, EARD ^a
Team members	Ruth Benigno, Associate Project Analyst, EASS, EARD Marian Kaye Gamboa, Operations Assistant, EASS, EARD Veronica Mendizabal Joffre, Social Development Specialist (Gender and Development), Office of the Director General, EARD

^a Outposted to the People’s Republic of China Resident Mission.

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KNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AT A GLANCE

1. Basic Data		Project Number: 55026-001
Project Name	Research to Strengthen the Policy Framework for Childcare Services	Department/Division EARD/EASS
Nature of Activity Modality	Policy Advice Regular	Executing Agency National Development and Reform Commission
Country	China, People's Republic of	
2. Sector	Subsector(s)	ADB Financing (\$ million)
✓ Public sector management	Social protection initiatives	0.28
	Total	0.28
3. Operational Priorities		Climate Change Information
✓ Addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities		GHG Reductions (tons per annum) 0.000
✓ Accelerating progress in gender equality		Climate Change impact on the Project Low
✓ Strengthening governance and institutional capacity		
		ADB Financing
		Adaptation (\$ million) 0.00
		Mitigation (\$ million) 0.00
		Cofinancing
		Adaptation (\$ million) 0.00
		Mitigation (\$ million) 0.00
Sustainable Development Goals		Gender Equity and Mainstreaming
SDG 4.2		Gender Equity (GEN) ✓
SDG 5.4		
		Poverty Targeting
		General Intervention on Poverty ✓
4. Risk Categorization	Low	
5. Safeguard Categorization	Safeguard Policy Statement does not apply	
6. Financing		
Modality and Sources		Amount (\$ million)
ADB		0.28
Knowledge and Support technical assistance: Technical Assistance Special Fund		0.28
Cofinancing		0.00
None		0.00
Counterpart		0.00
None		0.00
Total		0.28
Currency of ADB Financing: US Dollar		

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The knowledge and support technical assistance (TA) will help the People's Republic of China (PRC) enhance gender equality and women's capacity to participate in the labor market by strengthening the policy framework for childcare services.¹ The TA will produce knowledge products and promote institutional capacity strengthening for social service delivery.²

II. ISSUES

2. **Persistent gender inequalities.** Chinese women's labor force participation has been on a steady decline since 1990, falling to 61.5% in 2017.³ Women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care responsibilities both impedes their ability to seek work outside the home and affects their fertility decisions. To address these interrelated challenges, the government's 14th Five-Year Plan, 2021–2025 aims to improve family welfare policies and access to quality childcare services as an urgent priority.⁴

3. **Unmet demand for quality childcare services.** One part of the government's response to the falling birthrate was to replace the long-standing one child policy in 2016 with a new policy encouraging couples to have two children.⁵ The ensuing increase in the birthrate has exacerbated the unmet demand for affordable, high-quality childcare services. A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) demand analysis estimated that up to one-third of Chinese parents wish to access childcare services, but only about 5% of the 47.5 million children aged 0–2 are currently enrolled, indicating a shortage of about 10 million childcare spaces.⁶ There are two direct causes of unmet demand: (i) a shortage of total supply of childcare services, and (ii) institutional capacity gaps for quality childcare service delivery. During the 2 decades following the start of economic reform and opening up in 1978, the public nurseries that had been widely operated by state-owned institutions and enterprises were gradually closed down to align with market-oriented reforms. By the late 1990s, there were almost no public nurseries left, and private provision now dominates. Because of cost barriers, most young children are looked after by their families until they can start pre-primary education at age 3. Inadequate access to childcare services is linked to low levels of public investment, inaccurate demand analysis, and the imbalance between private and public provision. Quality issues stem primarily from a lack of regulation and supervision plus weak human resources and staffing. A key issue in human resources is that the devaluation of female-dominated occupations influences public perceptions of care work's value, skill need, and status. In addition, there are no industry standards in place, and there are capacity gaps among policy makers. The unmet demand for childcare services has stark implications for women's labor force participation and fertility decisions.

¹ Childcare services are aimed at children aged 0–2, and are also referred to as daycare, crèches, or nurseries. Chinese children attend kindergarten from ages 3 to 5, also known as pre-primary or early childhood education. Together, childcare and kindergarten are referred to as early childhood education and care.

² The TA first appeared in the business opportunities section of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) website on 17 August 2021.

³ In 1990, the women's labor force participation rate was 73.2% (footnote 5).

⁴ Government of the PRC. 2021. [The Outline of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035](#). Beijing (in Chinese).

⁵ X. Dong and V. Mendizabal Joffre. 2019. [Inclusive Growth in the People's Republic of China: A Deep Look at Men and Women's Work Amid Demographic, Technological, and Structural Transformations](#). *ADB East Asia Working Paper Series*. No. 23. Manila: ADB.

⁶ UNICEF. Early Childhood Care Service for Children under 3 Years Old during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period: Supply Framework and Government Funding Arrangement—Summary of Midterm Report. Unpublished.

4. **Childcare services and women’s labor force participation.** The policy shift toward encouraging more children has amplified the work–family conflict for women in light of the shortage of affordable, high-quality childcare services, and studies find that compared to those with one child, women with two children are more likely to sacrifice employment and career advancement for family responsibilities (footnote 5). This is partially explained by the difficulty of combining paid and unpaid work in the context of rapid urbanization, and the decline of publicly subsidized urban childcare services. The availability of affordable out-of-home childcare options increases the likelihood that mothers will participate in the labor force.⁷ It is more difficult for women to combine paid work with caregiving responsibilities in cities, where the workplace is separated from the home and work schedules are more rigid. The lack of access to affordable childcare in cities also causes family dislocation for migrant workers, with tens of millions of young children left behind to live with grandparents in home villages (footnote 5). A 2021 Asian Development Bank (ADB) policy brief that highlights the importance of increasing women’s participation in the labor market notes improved support for childcare among the measures that should be implemented to achieve this.⁸ An increase in the supply of quality childcare services would also create more decent work opportunities for women, who make up the majority of early childhood education and care workers.

5. **Childcare services and women’s fertility decisions.** Women’s choices are constrained when they have to choose between either work or children, and recent trends confirm that women are having fewer children. The post-2016 spike in births quickly slowed: the number of new birth registrations fell from 17.2 million in 2017 to 11.2 million in 2019 and 10.04 million in 2020,⁹ and the fertility rate has fallen precipitously to an average of 1.3 children per woman (footnote 8). The determinants of fertility choices are complex, but a 2020 study of nearly 1,000 parents who have one child identified two key factors in the intention to have a second: family income and access to quality education.¹⁰ The study highlighted that raising a child has become very expensive with the prevailing high cost of living, long working hours, and burgeoning childcare expenses. These difficulties have also come to light in the public’s response to the May 2021 policy shift allowing couples to have three children.¹¹ Increasing government support is key to increasing equitable access to childcare services, since purely private markets create cost barriers for lower-income families. Childcare centers in the PRC boomed from 2010 to 2020, but only about 20% are public and therefore more affordable—fewer than one-third of families surveyed could afford private nurseries.¹² A 2019 ADB analysis of inclusive growth in the PRC recommended that while the market serves well-off populations, publicly subsidized childcare should target children from disadvantaged groups to address their parents’ investment deficits (footnote 5).

6. **Policy framework.** The policy framework for childcare services is relatively new, with three high-level policy documents issued in 2019. These aim to (i) provide overall guidance and standardize service delivery (May 2019), (ii) establish preferential tax policies and fees for service providers (June 2019), and (iii) encourage the involvement of social forces in service

⁷ F. Du and X. Dong. 2013. [Women’s Employment and Child Care Choices in Urban China during the Economic Transition](#). *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. 62 (1). pp. 131–155.

⁸ ADB. 2021. [The Challenges of Population Aging in the PRC](#). *Observations and Suggestions*. No. 2021-02. Manila.

⁹ *Guancha*. 2021. [Ministry of Public Security: A Total of 10.035 Million Newborns were Born in 2020](#). 8 February (in Chinese). The official data from the Ministry of Public Security has not yet been published online.

¹⁰ Q. Wang and X. Sun. 2020. [Fertility Choices in China under the Two-Child Policy](#). *International Sociology*. 35 (3). pp. 284–311.

¹¹ *British Broadcasting Corporation*. 2021. [China Allows Three Children in Major Policy Shift](#). 31 May.

¹² *Xinhua*. 2020. [Across China: China Moves to Ease Parents’ Concerns by Bettering Infant Care Services](#). 28 December.

delivery (October 2019).¹³ New guidelines on elderly care services issued in 2020 integrate childcare service delivery principles.¹⁴ The 14th Five-Year Plan (footnote 4) aims at an inclusive childcare service system and further improvement of the policy framework. The plan envisions inclusive childcare services provided by urban kindergartens, new childcare centers, qualified companies and enterprises, and social organizations and other social forces. Targets by 2025 include (i) supporting 150 cities to use social forces to develop childcare centers and community childcare service facilities, (ii) adding 500,000 demonstrative inclusive childcare centers, and (iii) increasing the number of childcare places to 4.5 per 1,000 population (compared to 1.8 in 2020).

7. National good practices and international comparisons. Local governments have developed their own policies to strengthen supervision of childcare, increase investment, and develop standards and regulations to promote sustainable and safe expansion. National case studies can draw out good practices to help strengthen the national policy framework. Shanghai, for example, rolled out a series of policies in April 2018, jointly issued by 16 departments of the municipal government. The policies establish institutional mechanisms for the promotion, support, and management of childcare services. Within 1 year, Shanghai had set up more than 170 new childcare centers providing services to more than 6,400 children.¹⁵ The PRC may also learn from international good practices in childcare service delivery and financing. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries spend on average slightly more than 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) on early childhood education and care together, with large variation across countries ranging from 1.8% in Iceland to 0.1% in Turkey.¹⁶ Most spend more on early childhood education, likely a reflection of higher enrollment rates. Childcare spending among all OECD countries is 0.2% of GDP on average, and highest at 1.1% of GDP in Sweden, followed by Iceland (0.9%), Norway (0.7%), France and Finland (0.6%), and the Republic of Korea (0.5%).¹⁷

8. Strategic alignment. The TA is aligned with ADB's Strategy 2030 operational priorities 1 (addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities), 2 (accelerating progress in gender equality), and 6 (strengthening governance and institutional capacity). It will contribute to Sustainable Development Goal targets 4.2 (by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education) and 5.4 (recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate).¹⁸ The TA is

¹³ Government of the PRC, State Council. 2019. [Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Children Under 3 Years Old](#). State Council Regulation (2019) No. 15. Beijing (in Chinese); Government of the PRC, Ministry of Finance. 2019. *Announcement on Preferential Policies for Tax and Fees in Community and Family Services such as Pension, Nursery, and Housekeeping*. Announcement No. 76. Beijing; and Government of the PRC, National Development and Reform Commission and National Health Commission. 2019. [Special Action Plan for Supporting Social Forces to Develop Inclusive Childcare Services](#). Announcement 1606. Beijing (in Chinese). "Social forces" refers to all nongovernment entities, including enterprises, for-profit or non-profit companies, and social organizations, domestic or foreign.

¹⁴ Government of the PRC, State Council. 2020. [Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Promoting the Healthy Development of Elderly Care Services](#). Regulation No. 52. Beijing (in Chinese).

¹⁵ *Xinhua*. 2019. [China Focus: Childcare Centers Ease Chinese Parents' Anxiety for Having a Second Child](#). 11 July.

¹⁶ OECD. 2019. OECD Family Database. [PF3.1: Public Spending on Childcare and Early Education](#) (accessed 04 April 2021).

¹⁷ In some OECD countries, local governments play a key role in financing and childcare service provision. Such spending is recorded in Nordic countries but in some other (often federal) countries, it may not be fully captured. In nine OECD countries, the data for childcare and pre-primary education cannot be disaggregated.

¹⁸ United Nations. 2015. [Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Geneva.

closely aligned with both the gender and knowledge priorities of ADB's country partnership strategy (CPS) for the PRC, 2021–2025: (i) advancing gender equality with a focus on efforts to reduce women's time poverty and unpaid care work (a CPS implementation priority); and (ii) focusing on knowledge work that enhances institutional capacity to strengthen service delivery responsibilities (a CPS knowledge support priority). A key cross-cutting theme of the CPS is strengthening institutions and policies.¹⁹

III. THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

A. Impact and Outcome

9. The TA is aligned with the following impact: childcare service needs satisfied.²⁰ The TA will have the following outcome: policy framework to strengthen the childcare system for children aged 0–2 improved.²¹

B. Outputs, Methods, and Activities

10. **Output 1: Policy advice on strengthening childcare services finalized.** Output 1 will design a policy framework for the childcare system, considering the country's current policy system and local practices as well as national conditions and traditional culture. The main technical report will be based on research to prepare three sub-reports: (i) detailed analysis of demand for childcare services based on research in urban and rural areas, by region and household income, to put forward policy recommendations for optimizing the distribution of childcare places; (ii) comparison of international practices in childcare services and financing, summarizing experiences and studying different family welfare and support policies; and (iii) research to design innovative financing mechanisms to support the expansion of affordable childcare services. The research should also consider the human capital impacts of expanded access to quality childcare (and how to improve quality) in areas such as nutrition and cognitive stimulation. Output 1 will include theoretical research and literature review as well as field visits and primary data collection.

11. **Output 2: Institutional capacity for service delivery strengthened.** Output 2 will include a series of workshops, seminars, and knowledge products based on the research under output 1 on policy framework design, demand analysis, international comparison, and innovative financing. Inception, midterm, and final review meetings will support high-quality policy research. The TA will develop capacity among policy makers and through training of stakeholders from the government agencies and social forces involved in the delivery of childcare services (based on stakeholder analysis). Training materials will include national and international case studies. National case studies may include municipalities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and prefecture-level cities such as Nanchang, Shenzhen, Suzhou, and Xi'an. The final selection will consider geographic distribution and cities' development stages to avoid one-size-fits-all policies. International case studies most relevant to the Chinese context will be determined in collaboration with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). The TA consultants will develop a detailed capacity development and knowledge dissemination plan during the inception phase.

¹⁹ ADB. 2021. [Country Partnership Strategy: People's Republic of China, 2021–2025—Toward High-Quality, Green Development](#). Manila.

²⁰ Government of the PRC, State Council. 2019. [Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Children under 3 Years Old](#). State Council Regulation (2019) No. 15. Beijing (in Chinese).

²¹ The design and monitoring framework is in Appendix 1.

C. Cost and Financing

12. The TA is estimated to cost \$310,000, of which \$280,000 will be financed on a grant basis by ADB's Technical Assistance Special Fund (TASF-other sources). The key expenditure items are listed in Appendix 2. The government will provide counterpart support in the form of counterpart staff time, access to data, and other in-kind contributions.

D. Implementation Arrangements

13. The ADB East Asia Department's Urban and Social Sectors Division will administer the TA and recruit and supervise four individual consultants to provide 38 person-months of consulting inputs (2 person-months of international and 36 person-months of national inputs). ADB will engage the consultants following the ADB Procurement Policy (2017, as amended from time to time) and its associated project administration instructions and/or staff instructions.

14. Implementation arrangements are summarized in the table.

Implementation Arrangements			
Aspects	Arrangements		
Indicative implementation period	October 2021–September 2023		
Executing agency	NDRC		
Implementing agency	Social Development Department, NDRC		
Consultants	To be selected and engaged by ADB		
	Individual selection	International social policy and service delivery specialist (2 person-months)	\$30,000
		National social policy and service delivery specialist and team leader (12 person-months)	\$84,000
		National childcare services financing specialist (10 person-months)	\$55,000
		National TA coordinator and research associate (14 person-months)	\$42,000
Disbursement	Disbursement of TA resources will follow ADB's <i>Technical Assistance Disbursement Handbook</i> (2020, as amended from time to time).		

ADB = Asian Development Bank, NDRC = National Development and Reform Commission, TA = technical assistance.

Source: ADB.

IV. THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION

15. The President, acting under the authority delegated by the Board, has approved the provision of technical assistance not exceeding the equivalent of \$280,000 on a grant basis to the Government of the People's Republic of China for Research to Strengthen the Policy Framework for Childcare Services, and hereby reports this action to the Board.

DESIGN AND MONITORING FRAMEWORK

Impact the TA is Aligned with Childcare service needs satisfied (Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Children under 3 Years Old) ^a			
Results Chain	Performance Indicators	Data Sources and Reporting Mechanisms	Risks and Critical Assumptions
Outcome Policy framework to strengthen the childcare system for children aged 0–2 improved	By 2024 a. At least three childcare policy recommendations endorsed by the NDRC (2021 baseline: 0)	a. NDRC certification	A: Development of childcare services remains a government priority after the 14th Five-Year Plan, 2021–2025
Outputs 1. Policy advice on strengthening childcare services finalized 2. Institutional capacity for service delivery strengthened	By Q3 2023: 1a. A technical report on policy framework design prepared by 2023 that includes policy recommendations (2021 baseline: not prepared) 1b. Sub-report 1 on demand analysis prepared by 2022 (2021 baseline: not prepared) 1c. Sub-report 2 on international comparison prepared by 2022 (2021 baseline: not prepared) 1d. Sub-report 3 on innovative financing mechanisms prepared by 2022 (2021 baseline: not prepared) 2a. At least 75% of participants in capacity building activities report improved understanding of childcare service delivery policies and issues by 2023 (2021 baseline: 0) 2b. At least 10 national and international case study briefs prepared by 2022 (2021 baseline: 0) 2c. One knowledge product finalized and disseminated by 2023 (2021 baseline: 0)	1a. TA consultants' final report 1b–d. TA midterm report 2a. Survey of participants 2b–c. TA final report and knowledge product	R: Challenges in data availability

Key Activities with Milestones

1. Policy advice on strengthening childcare services finalized

- 1.1 Develop a detailed research plan, working closely with the implementing agency technical staff and based on stakeholder analysis and consultations, to be finalized and approved at the inception workshop (by Q4 2021)
- 1.2 Review literature and undertake research to produce the demand analysis sub-report 1 (Q4 2021–Q3 2022)
- 1.3 Review literature and undertake research on international case studies in childcare service delivery, quality improvement, and financing policies and mechanisms to prepare the international comparison sub-report 2 (Q4 2021–Q3 2022)
- 1.4 Undertake detailed analysis to propose innovative financing mechanisms to promote affordable childcare service delivery and produce the innovative financing sub-report 3 (Q4 2021–Q3 2022)
- 1.5 Synthesize the three sub-reports to produce a comprehensive technical report on the recommended design of a policy framework that includes clear policy recommendations on how to expand the provision of affordable, quality childcare, with a concise executive summary (by Q1 2023)

2. Institutional capacity for service delivery strengthened

- 2.1 Develop a detailed capacity development and knowledge sharing and dissemination plan (to include a methodology for assessment of DMF outcome indicator 2a), working closely with the implementing agency, to be finalized and approved at the inception workshop (Q4 2021)
- 2.2 Develop format for national and international case studies and produce 10 case study briefs on improving access, quality, and financing of childcare services to serve as training materials in capacity development activities (Q3 2022)
- 2.3 Organize inception, midterm, and final workshops (Q4 2021–Q3 2023)
- 2.4 Implement the capacity development and knowledge sharing plan, including a series of capacity development activities aimed at stakeholders from government agencies, private sector entities, and social forces involved in childcare service delivery and supervision (Q4 2022–Q3 2023)
- 2.5 Produce and disseminate a knowledge product based on the technical report and case studies in English and Chinese (by Q2 2023)

Inputs

ADB: \$280,000 (Technical Assistance Special Fund-others)

Note: The government will provide counterpart support in the form of counterpart staff time, access to data, and other in-kind contributions.

A = assumption, ADB = Asian Development Bank, DMF = design and monitoring framework, NDRC = National Development and Reform Commission, OP = operational priority, Q = quarter, R = risk, TA = technical assistance.

^a Government of the People's Republic of China, State Council. 2019. [Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Children under 3 Years Old](#). State Council Regulation (2019) No. 15. Beijing (in Chinese).

Contribution to Strategy 2030 Operational Priorities:

The expected values and methodological details for all OP indicators to which this TA will contribute results are detailed in Contribution to Strategy 2030 Operational Priorities (accessible from the list of linked documents in Appendix 3). In addition to the OP indicators tagged in the DMF, this TA will contribute results for

OP 1.1: People benefiting from improved health services, education services, or social protection (number)

OP 2.4.2: Child and elderly care services established or improved (number)

OP 6.2.1: Service delivery standards adopted and/or supported in implementation by government and/or private entities (number)

Source: ADB.

COST ESTIMATES AND FINANCING PLAN
(\$'000)

Item	Amount
Asian Development Bank^a	
1. Consultants	
a. Remuneration and per diem	
i. International consultants	30.0
ii. National consultants	181.0
b. Out-of-pocket expenditures	
i. International and local travel	9.0
ii. Reports and communications	3.0
2. Surveys	10.0
3. Training, seminars, workshops, and conferences ^c	
a. Resource persons	12.0
b. Venue rental and related facilities	15.0
4. Miscellaneous technical assistance (TA) administration costs ^d	6.0
5. Contingencies	14.0
Total	280.0

Note: The TA is estimated to cost \$310,000, of which contributions from the Asian Development Bank are presented in the table. The government will provide counterpart support in the form of counterpart staff time, access to data, and other in-kind contributions. The value of the government contribution is estimated to account for 9.7% of the total TA cost.

^a Financed by the Asian Development Bank's Technical Assistance Special Fund (TASF-other sources).

^b Includes research assistance and translation of reports.

^c Includes translation and interpretation services, and other workshop-related expenses.

^d Includes editorial and online production services for knowledge products, as well as translation and dissemination costs.

Source: Asian Development Bank estimates.

LIST OF LINKED DOCUMENTS

<http://www.adb.org/Documents/LinkedDocs/?id=55026-001-TARreport>

1. Terms of Reference for Consultants
2. Contribution to Strategy 2030 Operational Priorities