Background paper prepared for the
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015

*Education for All 2000-2015: achievements and challenges*

**Rural-Urban Migration and Children’s Access to Education: China in Comparative Perspective**

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2015

*This paper was commissioned by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report as background information to assist in drafting the 2015 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the EFA Global Monitoring Report or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: “Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015, Education for All 2000-2015: achievements and challenges” For further information, please contact efareport@unesco.org*
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March 2015

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for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015
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Abstract

This paper evaluates China’s policies pertaining to the education of rural-urban migrants from 2000 to the present time in a broad historical context. It analyzes intended and unintended consequences of this policy evolution for children’s educational opportunities and provides evidence that China has made an enormous progress toward the level aspect of EFA goals with considerable room for improvement to realize the quality aspect of EFA goals. A comparative perspective of China with India offers a unique lens to advance our understanding of why some policies are more effective than others to move the nation’s free, compulsory education forward. Four lessons drawn from the analysis will inform UNESCO’s post-2015 agenda.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by an NSF grant SES-1259530 and a 2013-14 Fulbright Senior Research Grant to the first author. The paper was commissioned by UNESCO. We thank Zai Liang, Rina Agarwala, Michael Levien, Suchi Pande, and Sonalde Desai for their expert opinions and comments on an earlier draft and Yangyang Zhang for her assistance in locating and gathering original Chinese policy documents. Obviously, only the authors are responsible for the content of this article.
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Introduction

Education for All (EFA) goals set in Dakar in 2000 specified that by the year 2015, all children should have free access to primary education and an opportunity to continue to secondary school. China’s progress toward the EFA goals has been accompanied by rapid social changes. During this period, China has become the world’s second-largest economy and has experienced an unprecedented rural-urban migration that was the greatest single migration in human history in sheer numbers. By 2013, 165 million rural labors, more than one-tenth of total population, had become urban dwellers (NBS, 2014). Much attention has been paid to whether rural-urban migrants are given full citizenship rights in cities, and in particular, whether children of rural migrants are given full rights to study in urban schools. How adequate were the existing governmental policies for migrant children around 2000? What were the intended and unintended consequences of those policies? How did China’s central, provincial, and city governments respond to the new challenges of rural-urban migration as it transformed from single-person to family migration?

This paper provides evidence-based answers to the above questions. To do so, we first analyze policies and laws from a near-complete set of documents we gathered from China’s central government as well as the local governments of major migrant destinations. We conducted a thorough search of reliable and governmental sources in three policy areas: the education of children of rural-urban migrants, residential constraints on rural-urban migrants, and regulations on the registration of a rural hukou in urban areas. Then, we derive trends of rural-urban migration and the schooling situation of affected children from statistics and existing empirical work. Next, we offer an empirical analysis of data from the China Education Panel.
Survey (CEPS), a large-scale, nationally representative survey. The baseline survey, conducted during 2013-2014 academic year, consists of 19,487 students in Grade 7 and Grade 9, as well as their parents, teachers, and principals, in 438 classrooms of 112 schools nationwide. This information allows us to assess China’s progress toward EFA goals. Finally, we compare the Chinese case with that of India. India is the world’s second-largest country and exhibits a fast economic growth. The two countries’ similarities and differences, in terms of children’s access to free education and their policy responsiveness to accessibility barriers, will help us identify the factors enabling or slowing the progress toward EFA goals and provide insight for the world’s post-2015 education development agenda.

**China’s Broad Policy Environment and Policies on Migrant Children’s Education, 2000**

To understand rural-urban migration in China, one must start with the hukou system. Established in 1950s, the hukou system bounds citizens’ rights with their hukou registration place (Chan and Zhang, 1999). In China, even today, most citizen rights are still hukou-place-bound. Before the mid-1980s, the geographic mobility of rural-hukou citizens was prohibited, but these prohibitions were gradually relaxed from the mid-1980s (Liang and Ma, 2004). This gradual relaxation came in response to foreign direct investment (FDI), which began to flow to China in 1979 and led to increased demand for low-skilled, low-pay workers. Another factor explaining China’s need to relax restrictions on migration was the 1994 land-leasing policy. As a result of this policy, China’s coastal-provincial governments began aggressively seizing arable land to build industrial parks and special economic zones (Tao et al., 2010). This infrastructural development, together with low taxes, successfully attracted FDI: China eventually became the largest destination of FDI, which accounted for over 40% of China’s GDP in 2003 (Wu, 2009).
FDI had both a moderate immediate effect and a sizable long-term effect on GDP (Hsiao and Shen, 2003). In addition, FDI was a main factor for the growing coast-inland imbalance of urbanization (Zhang, 2002), as well as a main driver of rural-urban migration in China (Hao, 2012). Given that China has 22 percent of the world's population but only 7 percent of the world's arable land, it was inevitable that rural people would have to migrate to urban areas for jobs. The scarcity of agricultural land was exacerbated by the land-leasing policy, environmental degradation, and widespread urbanization.

By 2000, rural-urban migration originating from many provinces had become self-perpetuating, as streams of village youth leaving school joined the army of migrants (Hao, 2012). Data from the China long-form Census 2000 showed that rural outmigration rate was 8.5% of the 930 million rural-hukou population in 2000, accounting for 79 million rural migrants; and the majority of rural migrants moved within the last 5 years (Hao, 2012). In the years of circular migration, children were more likely to stay in their home villages than migrating with their parents. It is under this broader condition around 2000 that we review policies related to the schooling of children migrated with their parents from rural areas to urban areas.

To illustrate policy changes, we chart the major developments in Figure 1. This figure shows the timing and title of each national policy from 1986 when the Compulsory Education Law was enacted. Our description and analysis of national policies will refer to this chart.

China enacted its compulsory education law in 1986, specifying planned educational expansion from universal primary schooling to universal junior-high schooling (Article 9). The law did not, however, address the rural-urban divide and the regional divide in educational development. According to Article 2 of the 1986 compulsory education law,
Government shall decide on measures to promote compulsory education, in accordance with the degree of economic and cultural development in their own localities. Thus, decentralization of compulsory education was explicitly stipulated in the law, allowing both between- and within-province differences in compulsory education development. Public funding is based on the population with a local hukou. Rural hukou migrants, however, simply could not be registered in urban areas and, thus, rural-urban migrants had no local hukou. The education of their children who migrated together, was not the funding responsibility of the destination city government.

The *Provisional Regulations on Schooling for Children of Migrant Populations in Cities and Townships* of 1996 was the first national policy to address the education of migrant children in China. In accordance with the 1986 law, the central government policies of 1996 and 1998 clarified the *sending-responsibility* principle for the provision of compulsory education for children of migrants: “The local government of sending areas should strictly control the outmigration of school-aged children. If these children have custodians in the hukou-registration place, they should receive compulsory education there.” Following this policy guideline, the Beijing government, for example, ordered that before a migrant child could attend a school in Beijing, the local police must check to determine whether the child really had no custodian in the home village. Any adults in the child’s extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins counted as custodians. The Beijing policy of 2002 ordered the “deportation” of migrant children if they could not provide a “no-custodian” letter signed by the village head. Left-behind children did not benefit from their parents’ geographic mobility to cities, because they could not attend urban schools offering greater learning opportunities, and they also suffered psychologically from multiple spells of separation from their parents (Duan and Zhou, 2005; Biao, 2007; Gao et al., 2010).
The national policies of 1996 and 1998 allowed rural migrant children to attend urban schools as long as there were no custodians in the home village and their parents paid “guest student” fees, which could be substantial. Treating migrant children as guest students and collecting fees by urban public schools would seem to violate the compulsory education law, but such actions could be justified by the hukou system that bounds compulsory education with the place of hukou registration, i.e., the home village. In addition, while the central policies specified that urban public schools should be the main venue for serving the educational needs of rural migrants' brought-along children, the actual likelihood of becoming a guest student in public schools was blocked by various local policies on eligibility, which were based on parents’ employment and duration of local stay. Therefore, the central policies of 1996 and 1998 effectively prevented the enrollment of rural migrant children in urban public schools.

These restrictions created a market of substandard private schools serving rural migrant children in cities. The central policy of 1998 encouraged this privatization, supporting the establishment of substandard schools mostly by business groups of rural migrants themselves. The policy went as far as to approve land use and tax breaks for building infrastructure, but it did not establish regulations regarding the quality of these schools. As a result, rural migrant children schools emerging around 2000 were scandalously profit-driven, had astonishingly poor physical conditions, and offered very low-quality education (Han, 2004).

In sum, at the time of the Dakar EFA meeting, the national and local policies pertaining to the education of rural-urban migrants were designed for circular migration. The consequences of these policies were to reinforce the rural-urban educational divide: The left-behind children of migrants attended inferior rural schools, and the brought-along rural migrant children faced either high guest fees in urban public schools or low-quality education in substandard private
schools serving migrant children. These policies effectively compromised citizens' rights to compulsory education. The unintended consequences were obvious: entrenched educational inequality not only between rural and urban but also between urban resident children and rural migrant children in cities. Overall, the progress toward the EFA goal of equal access was stalled.

New Challenges, Policy Evolution, and Consequences in China since 2000

Among the changes China has experienced since 2000, two were likely to have been drivers of the changes in policies pertaining to rural-urban migrants. The first is China’s rise as an economic power. It is no exaggeration to state that economic growth would not have been possible without the migration of low-skilled (and low-wage) rural-origin workers. Second, it was not merely the continuous influx of rural labor into cities but the change in the nature of migration that altered the challenges facing educational policy makers. The repeated, short-term, pre-marital, single-person, migration was transformed. Single-person migration is now only the initial stage of many rural-urban migrants’ life experiences. Migrants’ urban stays have become permanent, and migrants are increasingly joined by their spouses and children. Together these two economic changes have driven the policies changes related to rural migrant children's education.

China’s First and Second Generations of Rural-Urban Migration since 2000

According to National Bureau of Statistics, internal migration transferred some 165 million rural labors to urban areas by 2013, accounting for 12% of China’s total population (NBS, 2014). More than four fifths of rural migrant labors in hinterland provinces migrated to the urbanized coast (NBS, 2014). As rural-urban migration transformed from single person to
family and from circular to permanent, the generation composition of rural migrant population also has changed. According to 2010 Census, the number of left-behind children in rural areas increased from 20 million in 2000 to 61 million in 2010 (Duan et al., 2013b). At the same time, the number of brought-along children aged 0-17 reached 36 million in 2010 from 20 million in 2000; the number of those aged between 6-14 was 14 million, or 39% of all migrant children, a 24% increase compared to 2005 (Duan et al., 2013a). We can imagine that the second generation will outnumber the first generation in the near future. Members of this new second generation, who were either childhood arrivals or were born in cities, constitute an ever-increasing share of the student population and the young labor force in receiving cities.

Evolution of Policies on the Education of Rural Migrant Children since 2000

A systematic search of relevant policies from central government websites and selected local government websites yielded a large database, providing raw materials for this policy analysis. A glance at the numerous policies indicates that the policy evolution was characterized by a large volume, quick updating, numerous details, and vast local variations. We take the national policy of 2001 (see Figure 1) as a turning point in the central government’s approach to serving children of rural-urban migrants, departing from its previous approach. After this turning point, we show the evolution of policy at the central government level, supplemented with local variations of selected coastal provinces and municipalities.

A fundamental shift of public financing of the migrant children's education. The increasing number of brought-along migrant children as a result of the family migration trend and the decentralization of compulsory education brought to the forefront a question about which local governments – sending or receiving – and which level of government – provincial or sub-
provincial – should shoulder the financial responsibility of educating migrant children. As stipulated in “The State Council Decision on Primary Education Reform and Development” of 2001, the central government, for the first time in history, revoked the sending-responsibility principle of the previous policies of 1996 and 1998 and established a receiving-responsibility principle, according to which the government of receiving localities must take responsibility for financing migrant children's education. This policy shift is not complete, however, because it is silent about the collection of guest student fees by public schools.

Much of the resistance of a true public financing of compulsory education comes from the 1986 law. A 2006 amendment to this law addressed the financial responsibility for migrant children’s compulsory education by the local government of receiving areas. Article 12 states:

For school-aged children or adolescents, who have parents or other legal custodians working or living in places other than the hukou-registration places, who receive compulsory education in places other than the hukou-registration places, local government should provide them with equal conditions in receiving compulsory education. Specific policy is determined by province, autonomous region and municipality.

This amendment facilitated a central government policy of 2008 that explicitly abolished any fee collections by public schools from rural migrant children (see the “State Council’s Announcement of Exemption of Tuition and other Fees in Urban Compulsory Education” in Figure 1). It took seven years from the first establishment of the receiving-responsibility principle in 2001 to the policy of 2008 for China’s central government to arrive at a firm requirement for public financing of compulsory education for all children, regardless of whether they come from migrant families or native urban families. In a deeper sense, however, a span of seven years for a fundamental policy shift is not that long, given that this shift challenges the hukou-place-bound citizen rights and shakes the foundation of the dichotomous hukou system that had been in place for 60 years.
With public financing shifted to receiving areas, a variety of innovative policy measures were developed to handle the limited enrollment capacity of existing urban schools to absorb the ever-growing migrant student body. Before the arrival of substantial inflows of migrant children, urban schools began to face a shrinking student population due to the strict implementation of the one-child policy in urban areas. The number of rural migrant children far more than offset declining urban fertility, however, and under-enrolled schools quickly filled with migrant children. Local governments designed and implemented multi-mode measures appropriate for their local situations, such as educating migrant children in private schools, including migrant children schools, which by now were receiving tuition for migrant children from local governments. Much local variation is obvious. For example, Beijing shifted from supporting the establishment of sub-standard migrant schools in 1998 to strictly regulating these schools with an aim to enhance the environment (2008vi), while Jiangsu worked toward phasing out migrant children schools (2004vii) and Guangdong was keen on purchasing places in private schools (2011viii), perhaps influenced by the practice of the Hong Kong administration during its compulsory education expansion.ix Whether these multi-mode measures were short- or long-term depended on the local population goal. Some cities set a population-expansion goal, where new schools are still continuously being built, while other cities set a population-control goal, where building new schools has been and remains unlikely. We expect that the above multi-mode measures will continue over the long term in population-control destinations.

It was an important policy move to ensure that financial measures were followed by quality-control measures. These included regulating curriculum and instruction by local education departments and institutionalizing the enhancement of teaching quality through in-service training and inter-school corporations (2003).
The central government set aside funds for the schooling of migrant children to support local governments in the receiving-responsibility: It redistributed 15.83 billion CNY to urban public schools in receiving areas from 2008 to 2012. In policies of 2003, 2006, and 2008, the central government ordered local governments to “incorporate the population of migrant students into the plan of local education development and budget,” “provide more subsidies for public schools receiving many migrant students,” and “set up special funds at the city level.” In addition, policies of 2006 and 2008 specified that local governments should fund public education according to the “actual” number of students (including migrant students) rather than the number of local-hukou students, a criterion that had always been used in the past.

Not all local governments strictly followed the receiving-responsibility rule, however. For example, while the local governments of Shanghai, Jiangsu, Fujian, and Guangdong clearly claimed the receiving responsibility, the local governments of Beijing and Zhejiang continued to require proof of “no available custodians back at hukou-registration place,” according to Beijing’s 2013 policy and Zhejiang’s 2008 policy. There are also variations in the abolition of school fees: Beijing, Jiangsu, Fujian, and Guangdong began to eliminate “guest fees” for migrant students starting in 2004, while Shanghai and Zhejiang just started to reduce fees in 2008.

Underneath discussions about the public financing of education for migrant children lies the question of whether local governments actually have the financial capacity to support migrant children. As China’s total GDP is rising, so is the GDP of receiving cities, in part, because of migrant workers. In the “National Mid-to-Long-Term Educational Development Plan, 2010-2020,” the central government set targets of 4% of the local GDP to invest in educational development. Given rapid economic growth, city revenues for public spending on compulsory education in urban destinations should not present budgetary constraints for educating children.
of rural migrant workers. Rather than budgetary constraints, it is local receiving-area
governments' willingness to assist that has played a more important role. A lower degree of the
willingness may lead rural migrant children in cities to have lower developmental outcomes than
their native urban counterparts.

_Differential access to equal opportunity of compulsory education._ One catchword of the
central government policy evolution since 2000 has been the “equality” of compulsory
education. The realization of this equality is compromised by local policies that differentiate and
sort migrant students according to their parents’ socioeconomic status. At the central-government
level, the equality of compulsory education was specified in the “National Mid-to-Long-Term
Educational Development Plan, 2010-2020” of 2010 and the “State Council’s Decision on
Balanced Development of Compulsory Education” of 2012. According to the 2012 policy, local
governments should “increase high-quality compulsory educational revenues, gradually reduce
overcrowded classrooms, restructure weak public schools, and narrow the quality gaps between
schools.” In the policy of 2006, the central governments banned admission tests, tracking, ability
grouping, and selection in extracurricular activities at both the primary and junior-high levels.
These within-school measures, however, could not prevent between-school, pre-admission
sorting based on rural migrant families’ socioeconomic status and their residentially concentrated
neighborhoods.

Although, on average, the below-replacement urban fertility should have vacated enough
space to absorb migrant children, there are two possible reasons for the limited absorbing
capacity of urban schools in top destinations. In addition to the unparalleled scale and speed of
rural migration, the spatial distribution of migrant children has been unbalanced, with
disproportionately more migrant children in coastal cities and provincial capitals. Given the
limited school capacity for enrolling migrant students, destination provinces allocated spaces using a set of criteria, rather than a random assignment, such as a “lottery,” as used in many other policy measures. Although varied, most criteria are related to parents’ socio-economic status, such as the temporary residence registration, duration of local stay, payment of fertility-violation fines, payment of one-year plus social insurance fees, legitimate urban employment or small business, and stable residence. The local government of Guangdong invented a method for determining each student’s “cumulative score” in 2011, assigning points based on parents’ duration of stay, years of social insurance payments, occupational prestige, years of stable residence, one-child certificate, and payment of fertility fines. This cumulative score then was used to make public school admission decisions for migrant students. Rural migrants often joke about the fact that schools were testing them on their socioeconomic attainment rather than their children’s academic achievement. These requirements serve as indicators that effectively sort migrant students to different schools depending on their parents’ socioeconomic attainment. This exemplifies the stratification of access to compulsory education by social status groups.

Residential segregation and rural migrant children’s access to public education. A byproduct of rural-urban migration is hukou residential segregation in cities. Residential segregation between those with a rural vs. urban hukou did not exist before rural-hukou people were permitted to move to cities. While rural migrants’ low wages and strong motivation to save money contribute substantially to their concentration in low-rent city outskirts (Kang and Ding, 2005; Xu and Zhou, 2003), local regulations also restrict rural migrants from living in the city proper (e.g., the Beijing Government designated eight non-migrant districts in 2008).

Around 2000 school rankings by national, province, city, and district magnet schools were made public. Although the equality principle of compulsory education prohibits explicit
rankings, two institutional factors have maintained such hierarchies – the school institutional 
tradition and residential segregation. The school institutional characteristics can be seen by 
school location, class size, and students’ family backgrounds. Residential segregation means that 
migrant-concentrated neighborhoods necessarily send low-socioeconomic status (SES) students 
to low-quality schools. The milestone policy of 2001 explicitly reinforced this educational 
inequality imposed on rural migrant children by applying two basic principles. First, public 
schools were declared to be the main venue for serving migrant children, and second, public 
schools had to admit migrant children living in the catchment area, provided that the school had 
the capacity to do so. These two principles provide the rationale for high-quality schools situated 
in neighborhoods of affluent residents or mid- to high-ranked officials’ families to avoid 
admitting rural migrant children. Small relaxations were subsequently made in the policy of 
2008, when the central government revised the neighborhood school requirement to allow 
migrant children to attend schools in adjacent neighborhoods. Neighborhoods adjacent to 
migrants’ residences are usually far from the city center, however, and are just as likely to have 
low-quality schools as those in migrant-concentrated residential neighborhoods. The policy also 
stipulates that if the existing schools’ capacity is simply too small to accommodate migrant 
children, new schools can be built on government-granted land. Local governments of Shanghai, 
Fujian, and Guangdong, however, have all proposed to expand and renovate the existing migrant 
schools and build new public schools in migrant-concentrated areas. Despite these continuous 
attempts to alleviate the pressure of educating the increasing share of the student body that is 
from migrant families, the essential sorting as it relates to access to quality education by hukou-
segregated neighborhoods has remained intact.
Sorting beyond compulsory education. Before 2000, no central government policies addressed the transition to post-compulsory schooling for migrant students. The 2010-2020 Plan addressed this issue, and a proposal was made for educational equality beyond compulsory education in the “State Council’s Guidelines for Migrant Pupils’ Transition to Upper-Level Educational Stage after Compulsory Education” of 2012. These guidelines state that migrant students should be given equal opportunities, provided that their parents have “legitimate employment, legal residence, and a fixed number of years of social insurance payments” and that the migrant students have “a fixed number of consecutive years of schooling in local urban schools.” By sorting families by social status, children of rural migrants’ educational opportunities beyond the compulsory level may be blocked.

China’s Progress in Fulfilling the EFA Goals since 2000

School enrollment of rural migrant children. The first half of the 2000s saw a large percentage of rural migrant pupils attending substandard private schools designated specifically for children of rural migrant workers with a large local variation: 26% for Beijing, 60% for Shanghai, 50% for Shenzhen, and 75% for Guangzhou (Song, 2007). This situation has greatly improved with the evolution of policies pertaining to the education of rural migrant children over the last decade. Capitalizing on unique data from the Floating Population Surveillance Survey 2011 on 128,000 sample individual migrants who had left their hukou registration place for six months or longer, and all their children, Hao, Wang and Song (2013) estimated that among the nation’s rural-urban migrant children aged 7-15 the average non-enrollment rate was only 4.38% (see the first column in Figure 2a). The figure reveals a substantial local variation, as we would expect due to the variation in local government policies related to rural migrant children. Figure
2a shows that the non-enrollment rates among brought-along children were higher in some destination provinces (6.02% for Shanghai and 7.38% for Zhejiang) than in other destination provinces (3.98% Fujian and 3.04% for Guangdong). The non-enrollment rate varied across sending provinces (Figure 2b): Anhui, Sichuan, and Jiangxi exhibited higher rates (5.59, 5.73, 7.54%) than Guangxi and Hunan (2.84% and 3.69%, respectively). The low non-enrollment rates were accompanied by unequal access to quality compulsory education constrained by residential concentration. These authors depicted a residential pattern of rural migrants’ concentration in “within-city-villages.”xiv Of the brought-along children of interprovincial rural migrants to coastal cities, 30% attended public schools serving the within-city-villages and 10% attended schools for rural migrant children. Public schools serving city-village children were originally rural schools inferior to urban schools, and schools for rural migrant children were deficient.

Schooling of rural migrant pupils. To describe the schooling of both brought-along and left-behind children of rural-urban migrants, we exploit the newly available data from CEPS).xv The CEPS started with 7th and 9th graders in the 2013-2014 academic year, including 19,487 students in 112 schools. The CEPS administers five different questionnaires to (1) the sample students, (2) their parents, (3) their homeroom teachers, (4) their main subject teachers, and (5) their principals.xvi

We examine the admission policy and the learning opportunities for all children of rural migrants in junior-high schools as well as college expectation among the 9th graders. In order to capture the interaction of three social forces – rural-urban divide, hukou stratifier, and rural-urban migration that shape the educational opportunities, we used three variables – the type of hukou (rural vs. urban), the registration place of hukou (local county/district vs. nonlocal county/district), a distinction between inter- and intra-provincial migration, and parental absence
– to define our comparison groups. Based on these indicators, the five comparison groups of interest and a residual group of children of urban-urban migrants (resid in short) are identified. The five comparison groups of interest are: (1) urban-reference (u-ref) for students with local urban-hukou; (2) intra-provincial brought-along children (intra) for students with nonlocal rural-hukou from the same province; (3) inter-provincial brought-along children (inter) for students with nonlocal rural-hukou from another province; (4) left-behind children (leftb) for students with local rural-hukou with one or both parents absent due to outmigration; and (5) rural-reference (r-ref) for students with local rural-hukou with no parent outmigration.

The policy evolution regarding the education of brought-along children in urban areas has led to a point-system-like admission policy of selection. We measure this admission policy using parents’ report on additional number of documents required when enrolling their children to school on top of the hukou documents. The additional documents include temporary residence permit, local homeownership or housing lease, local employment proof or business license, local social insurance, types of occupation, and compliance with one-child policy, ranging from 0 to 6.

We conceptualize learning opportunities in school with five variables. (1) School rank, (2) the teacher-student bond, (3) school academic climate, (4) The number of school facilities, (5) class size. We are also interested in how educational experiences in urban schools prepare children in their pursuit of a college education. We examined 9th graders’ college expectation for a bachelor degree or higher.

Table 2 shows the weighted group means of the admission policy and learning opportunities for the whole sample as well as the college expectation of the 9th graders. We examined the group disparities against urban reference group, with a superscript “a” indicating whether the results are statistically significant at 0.05. Figure 3 offers a graphic view of the
admission policy among groups of comparisons. The average number of additional documents required for school admission is 0.28 for the urban reference (u-ref), since some schools in the catchment location may ask for home ownership or apartment lease. Understandably the average number of additional documents is smaller for left-behind (leftb) and rural reference (r-ref). In contrast, both children of intra- and inter-provincial rural migrants are required significantly more additional documents, with 0.58 for intra and 0.92 for inter. A close-up examination of the data showed 25% of inter was required 2-6 additional documents and the corresponding number is 15% for intra. This suggests that admission policy serves as an institutional selection of children based on their parents’ socioeconomic status. As a result, better-off migrants can bring their children along while worse-off migrants have to leave their children behind. Brought-along children, especially those who migrated across provincial boundaries, indeed face a point-system-like obstacle in receiving urban compulsory education.

Even though brought-along children are selected into urban schools after satisfying the school admission requirements, they continue to face unequal learning opportunities in key measures (Figure 4). For example, both children of intra- (25%) and inter-provincial (15%) migrants are less likely to attend high-ranked urban schools than their urban counterparts (31%), and the percentage of inter (15%) is similar to left-behind and rural reference at 13%. The other two essential conditions for learning opportunities – teacher-student bond and the school academic climate – are systematically unfavorable for brought-along children (Figure 4). Specifically, while all u-ref have an above-the-mean bond (0.05) and school climate (0.09), both intra and inter exhibit lower than average means, with bond of -0.10 (intra) and -0.09 (inter), and school climate of -0.07 (intra) and -0.25 (inter), respectively. In fact, all rural-origin groups (including intra, inter, leftb, r-ref) are lagged behind in key aspects of learning opportunities than
u-ref, regardless of urban or rural residence resulting from migration. Teacher-student bond and school climate for brought-along children are also worse than their rural non-migrant peers. This further implies that hukou stratifier continues to operate despite policies progressively relax the barriers for rural migrant children to receive compulsory education in urban destinations.

Two exceptions are the number of facilities and class sizes, for which the brought-along children (intra and inter) are similar to or even slightly better than the urban reference group. The smaller class sizes are worth noting. Despite many media reports about overcrowded classrooms for migrant children, this situation in public schools seems temporary as the average smaller class sizes in our results signals a significant improvement. These better indicators may reflect the conditions of recent-founded schools to meet the demand of a growing brought-along student body in cities. However, it is the school’s academic ranking, teacher-student bond and school climate that are more conducive to learning.

What is worth noting is the disturbing pattern for left-behind children – they have substantially and significantly lower learning opportunities provided by the school they were attending in all five measures, including lower school rank, weaker teacher-student bond, unfavorable school climate, fewer facilities, and larger class sizes. As a result, left-behind children are not only barred from urban schools by the point-system-like admission policy, but also suffer from deficient learning opportunities.

To see whether learning opportunities stimulate or prepare children of rural migrants to pursue a college education, we show the college expectation among 9th graders (the lower panel of Table 2 and Figure 5) xvii. While 7 out of 10 of u-ref expect for a college degree or higher, only a half of inter expect for college, which is even lower than leftb (55%) and r-ref (56%).
Only the 9th graders of intra have similar college expectation as u-ref, suggesting that the development level and college admission quota at the province level matter.

The empirical evidence demonstrates that China’s educational policy evolution since 2001 has produced near universal access to free, compulsory education for children from both migrant and non-migrant families and children from both urban and rural areas. Like their urban students, an overwhelming majority of rural migrant children attend urban schools with sufficient facilities and manageable class sizes. The Chinese government has reached the level aspect of EFA goals, including enrollment, school facilities, and class size. Yet, the point-system-like admission policy is a major barrier for school access for children of rural-urban migrants. By sorting children based on parents’ socioeconomic status, this also creates a new line of inequality order between brought-along children and left-behind children. In addition, brought-along children after being admitted still face unequal learning opportunities, pointing to the continuing stratifying role of hukou. At the same time, left-behind children exhibit the worst learning opportunities over the board and are placed at the bottom among all the groups. These sizable gaps in learning opportunities may translate into future status attainment, suggested by the lower educational expectation for college among children of rural migrants. While closing income gaps against the backdrop of China’s soaring income inequality is a long-term, hard task, doing away with hukou-related constraints in urban areas, promoting educational development in rural areas, addressing the pressing needs of left-behind children would help move China closer to fulfilling all EFA goals.

A Comparative Perspective of China with India
This section offers a comparative lens to identify factors affecting the progress toward EFA goals. China and India share certain broad conditions for comparison. They are the world’s most-populated countries (17.8% for India and 19.8% for China in 2011) and have exhibited the fast economic growth rates (a yearly average from 1991-2012 at 6.5% for India and 10.3% for China). Here we identify the similarities and differences in the trend of rural-urban migration, the formal labor-force position of rural-urban migrants, the degree of governments' policy responsiveness to migrant children's education, and the consequences for the education of children of rural-urban migrants. These comparisons suggest reasons for differences between India and China in their progress toward EFA goals.

*India’ Rural-urban Migration in Comparison with the China Case*

Regional disparities in levels of development have been a pushing factor of rural migration in India (UNICEF, 2012, p.2), and a developmental strategy shift in the 1980s has facilitated rural-urban migration. The Indian government abandoned the model of state regulation of markets and adopted a neoliberal model to embrace Indian capital and attract FDI (Kohli, 2006; Sen, 2007; Agarwala 2013). India's market liberalization is similar to (in a broad sense) and later than China’s marketization since the 1978 reform. Two differences in rural-urban migration between India and China are outstanding, however. First, the world-class elite college education with English-language instruction in Indian colleges has given rise to India's role as the “world’s IT outsourcing hub.” In contrast, China’s high literacy rate and labor-intensive, export-oriented strategy has turned China into the “world’s factory.” As a result, the FDI labor demands differ between the two countries: high-skilled in India and low-skilled in China. Second, in China a rural-urban migratory act can simultaneously complete individuals’
transformation from peasants in the traditional agricultural sector to formal workers in the modern production sector, because the literacy rate is high in China (91% in 2000 and 95% in 2010) and most rural-urban migrants are literate and can meet the needs of FDI-demanded low-skilled labor demand. In comparison, India is characterized by a mismatch between the FDI-demanded high-skilled jobs and the migration-prone rural labor force with a low literacy rate (61% in 2001 and 63% in 2006). Rather than becoming formal workers in the expanded urban economy, Indian rural-urban migrants take informal, unskilled, odd jobs that are extremely unstable, low-paying, and fall outside of the urban social safety net (Agarwala, 2013).

Rural-urban migration in India is not considered as an important phenomenon, and the related official statistics are scant. The India 2001 Census showed that internal migration was high at 307 million (30% of the total population), but only 21 million were rural-urban migrants, accounting for 2% of the total population. While the India 2011 Census summary statistics are currently unavailable, data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) suggested that rural-urban migration grew steadily during the 2000s. Estimates based on NSS 2007-08 showed that rural-urban migrants accounted for 5.6% of the total population, at 64 million. In addition to the migration of 6-month plus duration, short-term (1-5 months), rural-urban seasonal workers were estimated to reach 9 million based on NSS data, which is well-known underestimated. According to NSSO (2012) the urban informal sector includes non-agricultural casual workers in construction and manufacturing and the self-employed, such as artisans, petty traders, and very small business owners. For the purpose of this paper on education for children of rural-urban migrants, we consider children of both seasonal and non-seasonal migrant workers, at a rough estimate of 73 millions in 2007-08, engaging largely in the urban informal sector. Moderate scale and informal labor-force position are two characteristics of Indian rural-urban migration, both of
which are very different from the large scale and formal labor-force position of the majority rural migrants in China.

*India’s Educational Policies: General and Specific for Children of Rural-urban Migrants*

India’s basic education has been governed by the National Policy on Education (NPE), which evolved from 1968, when the policy idea of promoting universal basic education to children up to age 14 was initially formulated; to 1986, when closing disparities in access to primary education was emphasized and specific measures were designed; to 1992, when the NPE measures were expanded in design. Since then, a series of measures have been launched in accordance with the governmental campaign of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). One such measure is the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) of 1991 that addressed equal access and quality of primary education, with funding from the World Bank. This policy signified the commencement of relying on external assistance to reach the UEE goal. From 2000 to the present, the dominant policy has been Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Hindi, meaning Universal Education Campaign, featuring concrete measures that include expanding infrastructure and applying alternative modes of education, such as bringing tent primary schools to needy children.

Whether these policy measures are available for the entire child population is uncertain unless children’s right to education is mandated by law. By the late 1990s, only 8 out of 32 states and territories of India had a compulsory education law for children up to the age of 8, and later, 4 of them raised the level up to 5th grade (Joshi, 2013). Although children’s right to education was in an amendment to the Constitution in 2002, and the Right to Education Bill was drafted in 2005, no national laws explicitly stated compulsory education until 2009, when the Right to
Education (RTE) ACT was enacted. Article 3.1 of the RTE Act of 2009 states the mandate to provide free and compulsory primary education to every child: xviii

Every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education.

This provision guarantees that all children will enjoy the right to free and compulsory primary education. In particular, Article 5.2 of the RTE Act is highly relevant to children of rural-urban migrants (ibid):

Where a child is required to move from one school to another, either within a State or outside, for any reason whatsoever, such child shall have a right to seek transfer to any other school … for completing his or her elementary education.

This provision reflects that the Indian government has started to respond to the specific problems in compulsory education facing children of rural-urban migrants. And yet the RTE Act has not mentioned equal access to quality education or measures to revamp many run-down public schools in India.

The RTE Act started its implementation in 2010. The intended and unintended consequences of the Act, especially whether children of rural-urban migrants are enrolled in urban schools of equal quality remain to be seen over the 2010s decade.

General Schooling Situation of Children of Rural-urban Migrants in India

After consulting with experts of Indian Studies and attempts to conduct extensive searches, we realized that the literature on the education of children of rural-urban migrants in India is very thin. The very small number of previous studies and reports could not collectively provide enough information to outline even rough patterns of rural migrant children’s schooling situation around 2000 and from 2000 to the present time. Based on the discussion of general barriers and challenges, we believe that India’s progress toward EFA since 2001 has been slow,
drastically different from the remarkable progress in China. We hope that the implementation of
the RTE Act will initiate a new momentum to catch up with EFA goals and continue with the
post-2015 new goals.

India and China have one important characteristic in common: the rural-urban divide in
income, education, social insurance, and political power. This divide is overt through the hukou
dichotomous system that contributes to the discrimination of rural migrants in urban China. In
India seasonal migrants are more likely to belong to lower castes (UNICEF, 2012, p. 15). The
discrimination against rural migrants in urban India is first complicated by the \textit{de facto} caste
system that divides the population in all aspects of life chances throughout the life course (Desai
and Dubey, 2012). Rural migrants also face disadvantage from other institutional arrangements
such as the labor market (migrants are confined in the urban informal sector) and public
administration (migrants without a residence proof are denied basic entitlements including access
to subsidized food, drinking water, sanitation and public health facilities, education, and banking
services [UNICEF, 2012]). In particular, the quality of rural schools is inferior. In India, the
conditions of public schools in major migration-sending regions are dismal (Smita, 2008). These
low-quality schools affect pre-migration schooling for all children of rural-urban migrants and
post-migration schooling for left-behind children. Large variations in educational quality are also
witnessed in urban areas. Children who migrated with their parents are facing scandalous schools
in urban slums.

Today children of rural-urban migrants in India appear to face a double set of challenges:
(1) different from their Chinese counterparts who have few administrative barriers in re-entering
the home village school, the Indian schooling system at home is hard for returning children of
rural-urban migrants to re-enter (Rogaly et al., 2001, 2002); and (2) unlike in China, where
Mandarin Chinese is the instructional language throughout the whole country, India’s interstate migrants’ language is generally different from the destination language, which is often the instructional language of local urban schools, and this adds to the difficulties of enrolling in local urban schools (Bhagat, 2011). It is not an exaggeration to say that these specific barriers, together with the pre-migration mediocre rural schooling, may plausibly have placed children of rural-urban migrants in the most disadvantaged position among all Indian children.

National statistics about the schooling of children of rural-urban migrants are hard to locate after our many attempts. Although official statistics of the non-enrollment rate among school-age children 6-14 appear to be very low, less than 5% in 2009,\textsuperscript{xix} we suspect that this statistic left out migrant children for two reasons. First, it is documented that about 298,747 children were migrant laborers themselves (Smita, 2007) and that these children were apparently not enrolled in school. Second, local survey data presented a very different picture from that conveyed by national statistics. A survey of 70 villages in five districts in 2010 shed some light on the hidden problems. Coffey (2013) documented that (1) 17% of school-age children had never been to school; (2) among children who migrated with parents, only 20% reported “going to school” in the urban destination; and (3) 13-year-old children who had migrated in the previous year were 1.3 years behind in school. Other local studies, such as a 2007-08 survey in Brickfield Areas of West Bengal also provided a worse picture of the situation faced by migrant children (Majumder, 2011). Although these surveys are not nationally representative, they reveal bleak outcomes in terms of low school-enrollment rates and poor school performance among children of rural migrants, providing partial evidence for the slow progress toward EFA goals, in stark contrast to the significant progress witnessed in China.
From the above comparisons, we suggest that a major commonality between India and China is the similar liberalization of the market forces and that the root of the many differences in issues related to children’s education is the differential development levels. If this conclusion is correct, principles behind the evolution of policies pertaining to the education of children of rural-urban migrants in China are generally applicable to developing countries of lower development levels. India’s RTE Act of 2009 details the goals to be achieved but does not mention concrete means to reach those goals. Even though public education expenditures as a percent of total government expenditures have been about the same (13%) in China and India since 1980 (World Bank 2012), in China, public education funds have been spent on public schools, whereas much of the Indian public education expenditure has been spent on subsidizing private schools (Joshi, 2013). Concrete measures on determining how to spend public expenditures may help. One example of China's policies is to designate that destination governments take the major responsibility of funding free and compulsory education for children of migrant workers who contribute to the local economy. In this manner, the comparative lens here advances our understanding that China's policy evolution is not necessarily “China-unique” as in popular and scholarly opinions but could be widely applicable for developing countries that are heading in the EFA's direction.

**Conclusions**

This paper has evaluated policies related to rural-urban migrant children’s education from 2000 to the present time in the broad historical context of China, as well as in comparison with the India case. From the analysis we draw four lessons to inform UNESCO’s post-2015 agenda.
First, reaching EFA goals must occur in tandem with the expansion of basic education. This expansion does not equal educational equality at the basic education stage, because the additional investment may be misplaced or unevenly distributed. China's experience highlights the public sector as the main venue to provide compulsory education, with local variations in mobilizing private-sector resources. India's case lies at the other end of the spectrum, with a weak public sector in basic education. Thoughtful regulations are needed to prevent a cycle of inequality reproduction during basic-education expansion, because this inequality begets greater inequality at higher stages. In our analysis, the systematically deficient learning opportunities, lower expectations of children of rural migrants than those of urban students are a sensible predictor further educational inequality beyond the compulsory educational stage. Awareness of and actions for correcting inequality at the compulsory-education stage should be considered in the post-2015 agenda.

Second, educational decentralization, coupled with vast regional-development differences in a country, has a compounding, negative effect on reaching EFA goals. This de jure inequality of educational resources lays an unequal playing field on which educational opportunities and outcomes will diverge across regions over time. In addition, rural-urban migrants, especially those who move across regional borders, are vulnerable to falling through the education-finance cracks. National policies must explicitly mandate the financing of basic education for children residing in the region, regardless of migration status. China's policy evolution, from ineffective around 2000 to effective (such as the receiving-responsibility principle) during the last decade, attests to this importance.

Third, EFA goals aim at both equal access to the level of basic education and equal access to the quality of such education. The practice of central and local governments is to treat
the latter aspect as secondary to the first aspect, in terms of both timing and importance. Our analysis shows that schools adapt policy changes through changing institutional arrangements, such as sorting students to schools of different rankings and differential learning opportunities within schools according to migration status. Once in place, these institutional arrangements will create inertia resistant to changes while reproducing inequality in educational opportunities and outcomes. China's experience is such a case in point. If China’s policy evolution had simultaneously addressed both aspects of EFA goals, the emerging new patterns of educational opportunity and outcome gaps between brought-along children of rural migrants and urban students would have been avoided. This simultaneity is worth noticing in UNESCO’s post-2015 agenda.

Finally, our analysis emphasizes the importance of considering educational policies in the broader policy environment, in particular, coupling them with the most relevant ones in other policy areas. The hukou system in China can be considered as the most significant obstacle preventing progressive educational policies from reaching far. Hukou-related policies, such as confining rural migrants to outer, urban-rural transition communities, have a direct impact on differential access to quality education between rural migrant children and urban children. Other hukou-related policies pertaining to reforming the administration of hukou, no matter how progressive they may be, are essentially re-packaging the disadvantages of rural hukou status from one form to another. More generally, eliminating hukou, a structure that creates dichotomous inequality, would dismantle the very foundation of educational inequality in China, making many concrete educational policies that address issues given rise by hukou unnecessary, thereby improving the effectiveness of educational policies. We strongly suggest that this principle be included in UNESCO’s post-2015 agenda.
Notes:

i According to the China Census 2000, Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong were the six major province destinations of interprovincial migrants in China. We also selected the major cities in these provinces, including Hangzhou, Suzhou, Xiamen, and Guangzhou.


iv Migrant pupils typically have to pay an additional amount of 856 CNY (as high as 27,020 CNY) than local pupils, including a 603 CNY “guest student fee” (which could be as high as 10,000 CNY), 214 CNY “sponsor” fee (which could be as high as 20,000 CNY), and a 39 CNY “management fee” (which could be as high as 1,300 CNY) (Duan and Zhou, 2005), whereas the rural annual per-capita net income was just 2,253 CNY in 2000 (Chen 2012).

v See Appendices A and B at http://www.ams.jhu.edu/~hao/unesco_paper.


ix Refer to “caput schools” in http://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e41ch07.pdf


xiii The one requirement with reference to the students themselves is student registration in their home village.

xiv These city-villages maintained the collective ownership of land that had been leased out and continued to collect increasing rents.

xv The lead author is a co-PI of the CEPS in collaboration with the Renmin University. The ongoing CEPS is funded jointly by Renmin University of China and the US NSF.

xvi For more details see the CEPS:JH website: http://www.chinaeducationpanelsurvey.org/

xvii The general pattern in college expectation among groups holds in sensitivity test using the whole sample.


Bibliography


Liang, Z., Song, Q., 2013. Migration in China, working paper prepared for Handbook of Migration: Michael J. White (ed.))


<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>u-ref</th>
<th>intra</th>
<th>inter</th>
<th>resid</th>
<th>leftb</th>
<th>r-ref</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>All Sample size</td>
<td>19,487</td>
<td>7,537</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>1,226</td>
<td>1,262</td>
<td>2,465</td>
<td>5,994</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of sample</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 9 Sample size</td>
<td>3,563</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>3,105</td>
<td>9,208</td>
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Data source: Authors’ analysis using data from CEPS.
**Table 2. Weighted Group Means of Educational Opportunities and Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>u-ref</th>
<th>intra</th>
<th>inter</th>
<th>leftb</th>
<th>r-ref</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># additional documents</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.58a</td>
<td>0.92a</td>
<td>0.16a</td>
<td>0.18a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top ranked</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.25a</td>
<td>0.15a</td>
<td>0.13a</td>
<td>0.13a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-student bond</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.10a</td>
<td>-0.09a</td>
<td>-0.15a</td>
<td>-0.04a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.07a</td>
<td>-0.25a</td>
<td>-0.07a</td>
<td>0.02a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># school facilities</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>6.24a</td>
<td>6.22a</td>
<td>5.71a</td>
<td>5.85a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>53.77</td>
<td>50.40a</td>
<td>46.51a</td>
<td>54.32</td>
<td>53.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College expectation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Grade 9 only)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.52a</td>
<td>0.55a</td>
<td>0.56a</td>
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Data source: Authors’ analysis using data from CEPS.
China’s National Policies on the Education of Migrant Children

- Compulsory Education Act of the People’s Republic of China (1986)
- Provisional Measures on the Schooling of Migrant Children (1998)
- State Council’s Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education (2001)
- Adoption by Schools throughout the country of the “single flat rate” fee for compulsory education (2004)
- Implementation by the education sector of the State Council’s Opinion on Ways and Means of Resolving Migrant Worker Issues (2006)
- Revised Compulsory Education Act of the People’s Republic of China (2006)
- State Council’s Circular Waiving Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees for Pupils in Compulsory Education in Urban Areas (2008)
- Circular by the General Office of the State Council disseminating the Opinion of the Ministry of Education on ways and means of ensuring that children living in urban areas with their migrant worker parents sit local entrance examinations on completion of compulsory education (2012)
- State Council’s Opinion on the Promotion of the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education (2012)
- Circular by the General Office of the State Council disseminating the Opinion of the Ministry of Education on ways and means of ensuring that children living in urban areas with their migrant worker parents sit local entrance examinations on completion of compulsory education (2012)
- State Council’s Opinion on the Promotion of the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education (2012)
- State Council’s Circular on Sustained Action to Promote the Reform of the Household Registration System (2011)

China’s National Policies on Registration: the Hukou System
Figure 2: School Non-Enrollments (%) in Cities of Destination and Origin (FPSS 2011)

(a) Destination

(b) Origin

Figure 3: “Point System” – Number of Additional Documents Required in School Admission (CEPS)
Figure 4: Selected Learning Opportunities (CEPS)

![Graph showing selected learning opportunities with annotations indicating statistical significance.]

a: statistically significant from u-ref at 0.05

Figure 5: Educational Expectation (proportion) for Collage, Grade 9 (CEPS)

![Graph showing educational expectation proportions with annotations indicating statistical significance.]

a: statistically significant from u-ref at 0.05