

# China to loosen stringent urban residency rules

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China will loosen its stringent regulations on urban residency to allow more people to enjoy public services such as housing, education and health care beginning next year.

Chinese citizens have for decades been limited in public services they can access by their household registration, known as a hukou ("who-co"). The problem is especially acute for the millions of [migrant workers](#) who are often forced to either leave their children in the countryside or place them in unregistered and often sub-standard schools in the city.

While various cities have implemented incremental reforms, the move announced Saturday will relax the rules on a national basis and reduce opportunities for corruption and irregularities.

Migrants can apply for a residency permit if they have lived in the city they are applying in for a certain time and have a stable job, place to live or are studying, a statement posted on the Cabinet's official website said. Permits will enable them to access benefits including basic [health care](#) and children to have nine years of compulsory education.

While all cities must follow the new policy, cities can enact their own regulations according to "local conditions," the Cabinet said. This is likely to mean that big cities like Beijing will continue to be encouraged to control their population and have more stringent criteria for residency.

The reforms will take effect from Jan. 1.

"The move is to improve basic public services in urban areas and provide conveniences for residential permit card holders," the Cabinet said.

Following three decades of financial reforms, the world's most populous country became predominantly urban in 2011, and officials are encouraging the trend as part of a transition toward a more services-based economy. Of the country's 1.3 billion people, 55.6 percent now live in cities.

The reform reflects President Xi Jinping's campaign to allow more citizens to take part in what is termed the "Chinese Dream" of middle-class prosperity and household security. State broadcaster CCTV reported on the reform on Sunday's noon-time news under the heading of "underscoring the importance of people as the foundation and advancing fairness and justice."

Along with creating a generation of "left-behind" children, the hukou system is blamed for restricting the prospects of educated young people from the countryside who are sometimes forced to the margins in major cities such as Beijing.

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