

**THE RISE OF THE “FLOATING ELDERLY” (I):
A SIGNAL TREND OF CHINA’S
AGEING POPULATION**

ZHANG Min

EAI Background Brief No. 1348

Executive Summary

1. China's elderly has migrated to cities and urban areas or even foreign countries in droves to help their grown-up children raise the third generation.
2. The size of migrant grandparents, or more widely known as the "floating elderly", or "elderly vagabonds" (*laopiao* 老漂), has already reached approximately eight million in 2016, or six per cent of China's elderly population, and is projected to continue to rise in the next decade.
3. Migrant grandparents, especially grandmothers, intensively engage in caring for grandchildren as urban newcomers at an old age. Their involvement in grandchild care concentrates in major cities where they co-reside with their adult children to look after their grandchildren.
4. This phenomenon has taken place amidst China's recent socio-cultural-economic transformation, especially in light of the intensified multigenerational child care, the evolving patterns of internal migration and the rise of new immigrants in highly urbanised areas.
5. China's population has been ageing on an unprecedented scale before the nation becomes a highly developed country (*weifuxianlao* 未富先老). The fast-growing demographic segment of migrant grandparents provides a window for understanding the complex dynamics between social mobility, public service and family support.