



FAST FACTS

Questions and Answers About International Birth Rate Declines

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To what extent are birth rates declining around the globe?

- **Fact 1:** “The global average fertility rate is just below 2.5 children per woman today. Over the last 50 years the global fertility rate has halved” (Roser, 2014).
- **Fact 2:** “Finland and Norway, for instance, reached their historically lowest levels of fertility with 1.35 and 1.53 children per woman, respectively, in 2019” (Comolli and Vignoli, 2021, p.555).
- **Fact 3:** [China] “The TFR [Total Fertility Rate] was 1.22 in 2000 and decreased by 0.03 to 1.19 in 2010” (Jirina, 2016, p.790).
- **Fact 4:** “A progressive decrease in the birth rate has been observed in Sardinia. In particular, the percentage of decrease was 36.2%” (Corda, 2021, p.43).

Why are birthrates declining?

- **Fact 1:** “Developed countries tend to have a lower fertility rate due to lifestyle choices associated with economic affluence where mortality rates are low, birth control is easily accessible and children often can become an economic drain caused by housing, education cost and other cost involved in bringing up children” (Nargund, 2009, p.1).
- **Fact 2:** “Lack of affordable housing, flexible and part-time career posts for women and affordable and publicly funded (free) childcare have contributed to the current low fertility/birth rates” (Nargund, 2009, p.2).
- **Fact 3:** “Women who were familiar with a modern method of contraception were more likely to express a desire to limit their fertility” (Frye and Bachan, 2017, p.189).

- **Fact 4:** “Unlike developed countries that completed their demographic transition, China’s fertility decline has been interwoven with government-led enforcement of the birth control policy.” (Jiang, 2021, p.785).

How does economic insecurity to declining birth rates?

- **Fact 1:** [Italy] “Considering the average monthly rate of 4 births per 1,000 women aged 15-44 before the uncertainty peaked, some point estimates suggest a drop of approximately -0.2, which roughly translates into a 5% drop in births due to the sovereign debt crisis” (Comolli and Vignoli, 2021, p.563).
- **Fact 2:** “Births that took place in Greek hospitals in 2013, were lower by 20.42% compared to the last year before economic crisis onset.... The financial difficulties they are facing lead to a decrease in birth rates and increased contraceptive use” (Farfaras, 2016, p.157).
- **Fact 3:** [Greece] “It has been demonstrated that unemployment leads 3/4 of women to later childbearing (16). In accordance with those data we demonstrate that exists a significantly important, negative correlation between unemployment and birth rates. As unemployment increases there is an impact on births, which are worryingly decreased” (Farfaras, 2016, p.161).
- **Fact 4:** “The third group of contributing factors to the declining trend of TFR in the MENA region was the economic factors, including increased costs of child-raising, inflation, increased rates of women’s employment, housing and employment problems for younger people, and youth’s economic expectations” (Pourreza, 2021, p.4).

How do lifestyle changes affect declining birth rates?

- **Fact 1:** [Czech and Slovak] “Marriage and childbearing postponement dominate the decline in TFR, as women, especially urban women, enjoy more education, higher labor participation and the pursuit of career development” (Jirina, 2016, p.790).
- **Fact 2:** “Higher education and professional careers often mean that women have children late in life....Couples/women are delaying starting a family which has led to a true decline in their fertility levels due to ovarian ageing and related reasons leading to reduced chance of conception” (Nargund, 2009, p.1-2).
- **Fact 3:** “Changes in women’s attitude towards employment and early marriages, reduced interest in family formation among younger people, weakening of traditional values and norms of societies concerning parenting and child raising, and strengthening of their tendencies to the norms of western cultures were found to be

the most important cultural factors causing the TFR decline in the MENA region” (Pourreza, 2021, p.2).

- **Fact 4:** “As most childbirths occur inside wedlock [in China], the postponement of marriage depresses the proportion of married women of prime childbearing age, and results in a delay in childbearing and a decline in the fertility level” (Jiang, 2021, p.787).

How do reproductive preferences relate to declining birth rate?

- **Fact 1:** “As fertility falls, norms surrounding smaller families become more entrenched. Individuals are likely to desire smaller families; and if means are available to allow them to realize their son preference with small family size, they are likely to do so. This is the motivating idea to generate an individual’s probability (readiness) to abort” (Kashyap and Villavicencio, 2016, p.1270).
- **Fact 2:** “If a couple has two sons [in Korea], only 3.5% of them have a third child. If a couple has two daughters instead, the probability of having a third child rises by 30.8 percentage points to 34.3%” (Kim and Lee, 2020, p.941).

How might COVID-19 contribute to declining birthrates?

- **Fact 1:** “Thus, in addition to the physical health effects of the virus in those persons infected, the pandemic [globally] is also causing detrimental social and mental health effects, which in turn can influence fertility, conception, gestation, and birth” (Ullah, 2021, p.3).
- **Fact 2:** [Sardinia] “In particular, the number of births was 8,858 in 2019 and 8,071 in 2020 with a decrease rate of -8.90%. The number of IA was 1,588 in 2019 and 1,393 in 2020 with a decrease rate of -12.30% during COVID-19 pandemic” (Corda, 2021, p.43-44).
- **Fact 3:** “Reproductive Health Service [in India] reported that about 25 million people were unable to access contraception in May 2020 during lockdown. Among all other less privileged sectors of the population in LMIC, the lack of access to birth control services is further apparent, and likely to result in millions of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal deaths” (Ullah, 2021, p.5).

What are countries doing to address declining birth rates?

- **Fact 1:** “The decline in TFR was first observed in Lebanon and then in other countries such as Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Turkey. It is worth mentioning that the last three countries were among the first countries that officially supported family planning programs” (Pourreza, 2021, p.2).

- **Fact 2:** “The government of Sweden has implemented a wide range of measures including tax allowances, childcare services, and other subsidies, as well as an 18 month parental leave to be shared between mothers and fathers” (Karita and Kitada, 2018, p.322).
- **Fact 3:** “France has expanded childcare and provided incentives by increasing childcare/family benefits with each subsequent child” (Karita and Kitada, 2018, p.322).
- **Fact 4:** “On the other hand, the fertility level, and the birth number [in China] are going down, contrary to the governments and academics’ projections, even under the relaxed policy. The Chinese government now states that it encourages people to give birth according to the policy, implicitly implying a reversal from an antinatalist to a partially pronatalist policy, as birth control has not completely ceased” (Jiang, 2021, p.797).

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About the Author

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