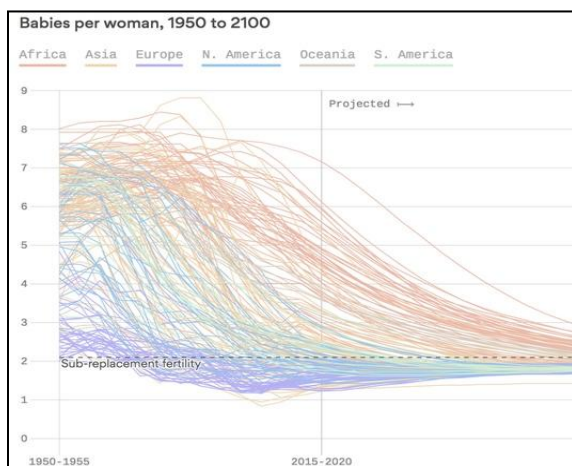
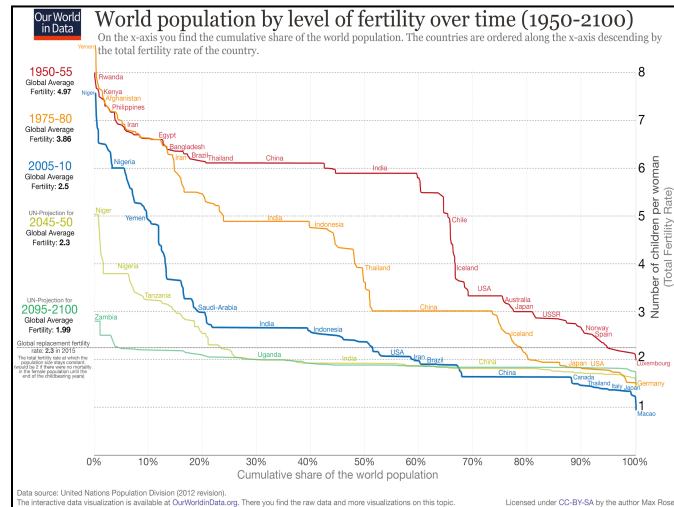


## Introduction

The current global birth rate is 17.464 births per 1,000 people, a 1.15% decline from 2022. In 1950, the United Nations (UN) began keeping track of the global birth rate, and since then, there has never been an increase in birth rate. Since the UN began monitoring the global birth rate, it has dropped approximately 76.47% from the initial birth rate recorded in 1950. Alongside the decreasing birth rate, the global fertility rate is also decreasing with 2.418 births per woman being the current rate. This rate is getting closer every year to reaching the “Replacement Level” which is 2.1 births per woman. If the replacement level is reached there is no longer a sustainable amount of births. By the year 2050, it is predicted that the fertility rate will reach the replacement level. Birth rate is the number of live births per 1,000 people each year, and fertility rate is the



average number of children born during a woman's peak reproductive years (15-44). In 2100, it is expected, with the current birth rate, that Italy's population of 59.11 million will drop to 28 million and Japan's 128 million will drop to under 53 million. A few of the reasons for the falling birth rate are higher incomes, improved

education, greater access to health care/reproductive services, and an increase in anxiety regarding the environmental or economic outlook for the future. Most potential parents now view having children as not economically viable. For example, in the United States, it costs approximately \$284,570 to raise one child for 18 years, while the global average is \$168,384. This estimate is only predicted to continue increasing, bringing adults more likely to avert from creating new families.

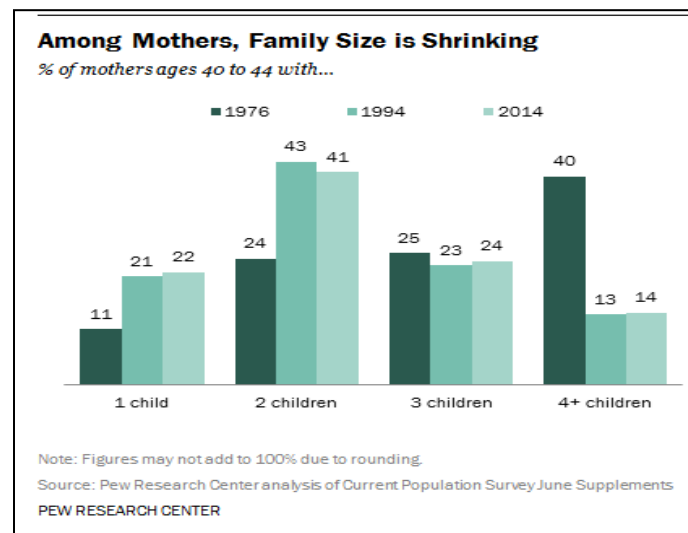
## **The Problem**

Approximately 48% of the world's population live in countries where women have children at a rate below the replacement level. Fertility rate directly affects both human (workforce related skills, talents, etc.) and social (family dynamic, human relationships, etc.) capital. Human capital greatly benefits whenever fertility rates drop low. With less employees available, the demand for them will dramatically increase, thus bringing the per capita income to skyrocket. Employees will then use their higher wages to invest in their children (consumption). This intensified consumption will cause the younger generation to develop greater tiered skills, thus their human capital goes up. Lower fertility rates create better workers, but if left unrestricted, the fertility rate will continue to lower until it falls beneath the replacement level—where no amount of skilled workers can save the population. This only applies to non-research and development (R&D) based workers. The lower employee numbers at R&D based organizations could greatly hinder the output of the field, causing technological advancements to grow stagnant. Additionally, the personal health of workers greatly increases with a low fertility rate, as adults have more money to spend and less children to spend money on, so those adults

will be capable of investing into themselves more than they would be able to with a higher fertility rate.

A man's prime parenting age (PPA) ranges from his late twenties to early thirties while a woman's PPA ranges from late teens to late twenties. Approximately 37% of all men in their PPA live without at least one child (up from 16% in 1970), and 27% of all women in their PPA live without one child (up from 12% in 1970). Childless men are significantly more likely to not work at all compared to fathers in their PPA. Low fertility rates leave a significant strain upon the social capital, as families with children are often lacking siblings. This trend is expected to continue throughout the future. Currently, the average household has about 1.5 children. and

households with several children are highly likely to only have a maximum of two children. Having a sibling provides a child with many valuable opportunities that can significantly benefit them later in life. A sibling allows for a kid to develop a close friendship very early in life which



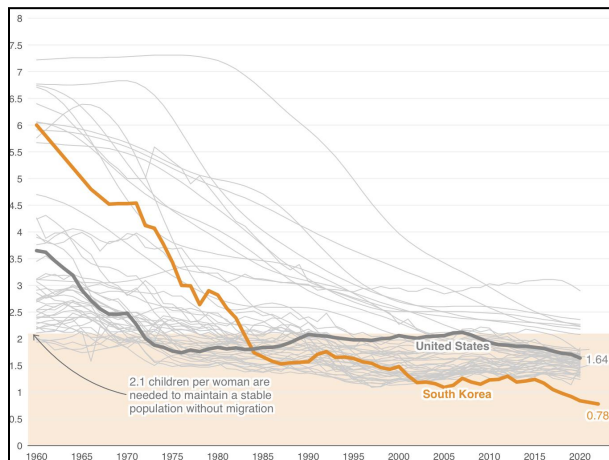
grants them an emotional support they can always depend upon. Siblings can shape a child's social development and are capable of instilling a strong social capital in a person.

Kindergartners with siblings were reported to have better interpersonal skills, fewer externalizing behaviors, and higher self-control compared to kindergartners without siblings. The declining fertility rate results in a nation's elderly population having a smaller amount of adult children. In 2022, approximately 76% of elderly citizens have at least one adult child, but in 2061 this percentage will drop to 58%. When an elderly person lives with one of their adult children it is

reported the elderly person has significantly better mental and physical health outcomes than elderly people who live on their own. A loss in fertility rate will result in worse health conditions for the elderly.

The falling birth rate spells out disaster for many governments. This is due to the fact that these governments are losing much needed taxpayers—not enough children are being born each year to replace this loss. Even with heightened taxes, a severe budget crisis is guaranteed to occur. Thus many public programs will either get completely cut or will lose funding.

In South Korea, the birth rate is 6.769 births per 1,000 people, and the fertility rate is 0.78 births per woman. The work culture, alongside the soaring housing prices in South Korea, has made having children an unrealistic fantasy. Prioritizing work over getting married has led to marriage rates dropping by 35% since 2013. Additionally, beginning in 2013, South Korea has had the lowest fertility rate in the entire world. On March 2, the Gusong Elementary School in



Hongcheon-gun, Gangwon-do held an entrance ceremony for the singular student who enrolled in that year. Park Ji Hwan is the only first grader at the school, and he will be sharing a classroom with the three second graders. In Gangwon-do alone, there were twenty other schools with identical

enrollment to Gusong, among twenty other schools that had zero enrollments this year. In an attempt to counter their low fertility rate, South Korea has implemented some of the most beneficial childcare policies in the world: they have a year and a half long paid parental leave, and they provide one million won (\$765) every single month to parents with children under the age of one. The extreme work culture and housing crisis undermine the government's efforts to

bring the fertility rate up. In the past 16 years, over \$200 billion have been spent in efforts to support new mothers, yet in those 16 years, the fertility rate has dropped 25%.

One of the biggest causes of the declining fertility rate is the newfound access to contraception. In the mid 1970s, El Salvador had a fertility rate of 5.44 births per woman with approximately 28% of the female population being on birth control. By the mid 2000s, the fertility rate had dropped to 2.72 births while the percentage of women on birth control more than doubled. Out of all women in their PPA, 49% of them were recorded as having used some form of contraception—this is a 7% increase from 1990 where only 42% of women in their PPA used contraception. The usage of contraceptives and overall education rates of women are proportional to each other. In nations where a large percentage of women completed at least the lower secondary level of education (7-9 grade), there is a corresponding high percentage of contraceptive use. For instance, in Kenya, only 12% of women completed their lower secondary level of education during the 1970s, and 5% of women in their PPA used contraception. In the 2010s, the education rate rose to 59%, and the contraception rate grew to 51%. To state it plainly, Kenya used to have a fertility rate of 7.64 births per woman in the 1970s, but now Kenya has a fertility rate of 4.06. It is reported that if abortions were illegal in any developed nation, the fertility rate in that country would be 20-90% higher. Abortion barely makes a dent in the fertility rate crisis when compared to contraception. It would take every woman in their PPA to have three to four abortions in order for abortion to rival contraception. In the United States, States with legal abortions have experienced a 4% decline in fertility when compared to states that outlawed abortion. If women did not travel between states to receive abortions, the overall fertility rate for the US would increase by 11%. A complete criminalization of abortions would result in an additional 440,000 births each year for the US.

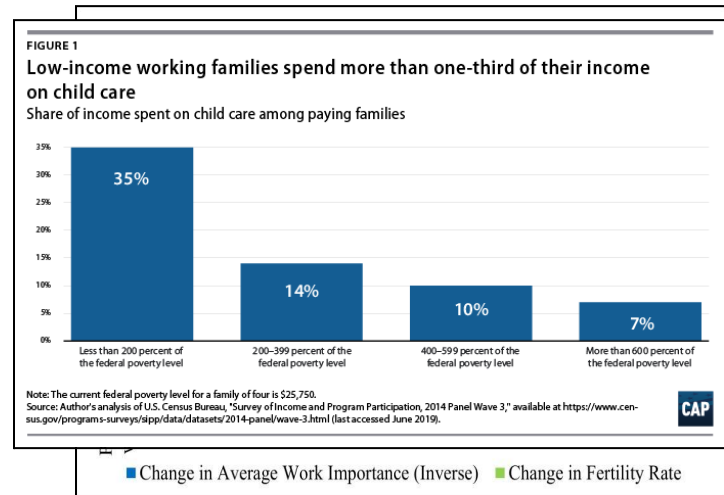
## Solutions

Since 2002, France has raised their fertility rate from 1.74 to 2.08. This is due to a number of pro-natalist policies, ranging from tax deductions to paid maternity leave. The effort of these welfare programs is to reduce stress on working parents and encourage childbirth. The most important of these welfare programs is the childcare program. Having access to a cheap place that will properly look after one's kid(s) is indispensable to parents and the countries that have quality childcare programs all reported a significant boost in the fertility rate. Childcare allows

for parents to work longer hours, miss less workdays, and potentially, open up new possibilities for parents to further pursue their education. Childcare, on its own, can actually be more

detrimental to the fertility rate: if parents are forced to pay out of pocket, it creates a severe economic strain on many

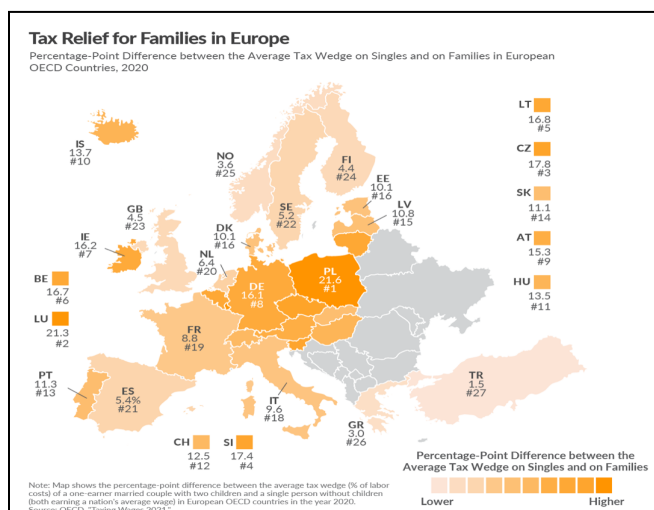
households. In a recent New York Times poll, it was found that 59% of parents view paying for childcare as a significant financial strain. On average, families will spend \$553.32 per month for a single child with 20% of parents spending over \$1,000 per month. This cost burden often forces parents to cut down on other expenses or work a second job, greatly increasing stress on parents. Such stress prevents parents from having additional children, stagnating or lowering their country's fertility rate. A quick solution would be to fund the childcare services via government dollars, however determining where the funds come from is another difficult question.



Workism remains one of the most prominent components that hold the fertility rate back. Workism is the belief that employment is not only necessary for economic production but is also the centerpiece of one's identity and life purpose. Workism promotes careers over families—a belief that prevents many individuals from ever having the desire to start a family. An unmotivated population will make little effort to try and find themselves a partner let alone have children. An effective way to combat workism is to reduce the length of the work week: having more free time will force employees to take up new means to fulfillment outside of work and potentially, start wanting to make a family. Furthermore, increased time outside of work will also free up time for potential parents where they feel they can comfortably raise a child. Outside of lowering the length of a work week, increasing employee benefits, specifically parental leave, will also aid in bringing the fertility rate up. More available time leads to potential parents feeling more confident or comfortable in raising a child. Longer periods of paid parental leave have been reported to significantly increase productivity upon returning to work. Employees are less likely to leave the company due to complications regarding parental leave—such companies do not have to spend as much money on training or hiring new employees, thus lowering costs.

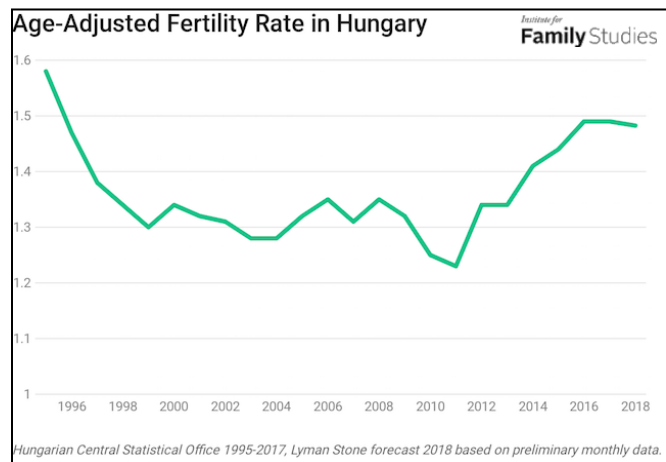
Incentivizing citizens to have children is another potentially effective solution to the birth rate conundrum. The most common incentive provided to parents is a simple monthly payment until the child reaches a certain age. As previously stated, South Korea provides one million won

per month until the child reaches the age of one. Australia, Canada, France, Poland, Russia, and Singapore all offer similar bonuses. The United States had the Child Tax Credit during the Covid-19 pandemic which provided \$300 each month to



children under the age of 6, and \$250 each month to children under the age of 17. This credit was only available to families below the \$400,000 income line. Additionally, in a month that a new child was born, the family received an additional \$2,000. This act was considered an enormous success. Another popular incentive is for a government to lower the tax wedge for families. A tax wedge is the sum of income taxes and payroll taxes of a worker earning the average wage in a country divided by the total labor cost of this worker. The difference between the tax burden on families with children and families without children is staggering in many European countries. In Poland, the government lowers a family with children's tax burden by 21.6% compared to a childless household. Poland has the highest difference, and Turkey has the lowest difference (1.5%). In 2018, Hungary created legislation that provides housing subsidies to families. The subsidies scale by length of the relationship between the couples and amount of children they have. The Family Housing Allowance

Program (CSOK) provides a maximum of \$36,000 to families with three children in order to purchase a new home. On top of that, Hungary also provides tax relief on the newly bought home which equates to the family saving \$50,000-\$80,000. As a



result of the CSOK, the fertility rate in Hungary has been gradually rising since the year that the program was introduced.

Another approach is for governments to instill the importance of marriage into their population. For example, China forces all couples that are considering divorce to reminisce on their relationship in hopes to out their issues. Additionally, Japan offers funding to local governments so they can sponsor speed dating events. While Denmark and Singapore both have



ad campaigns centered around encouraging young couples to have sex for their country. Russia took this to an extreme with establishing several national holidays around intercourse. These nations' goals are to enhance the importances of marriage through exemplifying that martial benefits extend beyond the couple.

## Questions for Debate

- At the cost of the fertility rate, are women's empowerment movements worth it?
- How much control should a government have over one's family?
- Is birth control a human right?
- Should multi-children households be considered more important than single children households?
- What are some potential solutions to the birth/fertility rate crisis?
- What is the ideal global fertility rate?
- How serious is this birth/fertility rate issue?

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