



Southern China International MUN

Official Background Guide

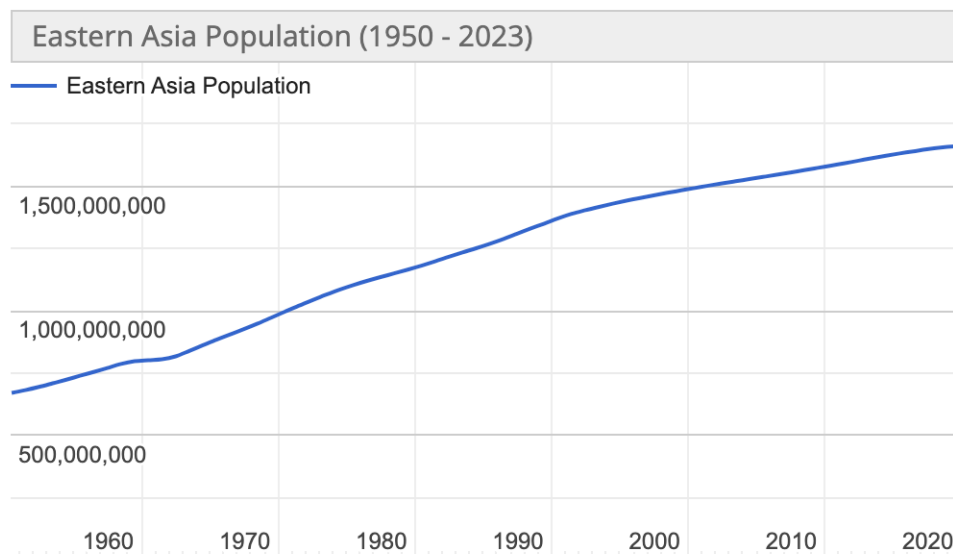
United Nations Development Programme: On measures to counteract declining birth rates in East Asian countries.

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1. Description of the Issue

1.1 History of the Issue

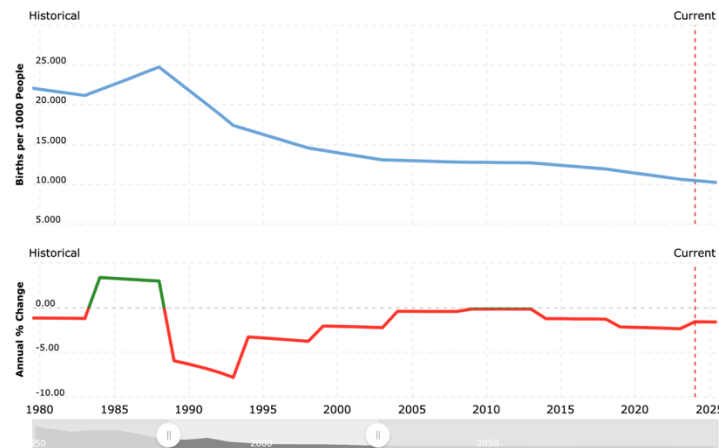
Developing countries, once bloomed with rapid development and explosive birth rates, face a brand-new challenge: The issue of decreasing birth rates. During a stage of rapid development, a country's economy was not all that was developing. Populations were rapidly increasing at record-breaking rates. In fact, since the 1950s, the total population in Eastern Asia has tripled. ("Population of Eastern Asia (2023) - Worldometer")



However, with recent shifts in culture and socio-economic dynamics, specifically in gender roles and financial situations, people have grown increasingly hesitant about having kids. As of now, it seems that total populations are going to take a toll.

One big piece of evidence that we can use to predict this is the impact of China's one-child policy. China's one-child policy was put in place after China started facing a large overpopulation problem where the government started fearing the potential strain that it would have on the country's welfare systems and state-planned economy. However, although this policy

did achieve the desired goal of decreasing births, it would also lead to a number of unintended impacts. Firstly, it should be noted that China's one-child policy prevented the birth of 400 million babies ("The Effects of China's One-Child Policy | Britannica"). However, this caused a great imbalance between the 2 genders, as people were fonder of having sons instead of daughters, with there being 16% more male babies than female babies("Without One-Child Policy, China Still Might Not See Baby Boom, Gender Balance"). The graph below shows both the short and long-term impact that the one-child policy has had on the birth rates of China since its establishment in 1980 and rescindment in 2016. ("One-Child Policy - Population Control, Gender Imbalance, Social Impact | Britannica")



("China Birth Rate 1950-2024")

A total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.1 is needed to break even and maintain a population. Anything below that will lead to a decrease in the total population and an increase in the average age of the population. On the other hand, anything above a TFR of 2.1 will cause the total population to increase and decrease the average age of the population (*TOTAL FERTILITY RATE Demographics Population Change*).

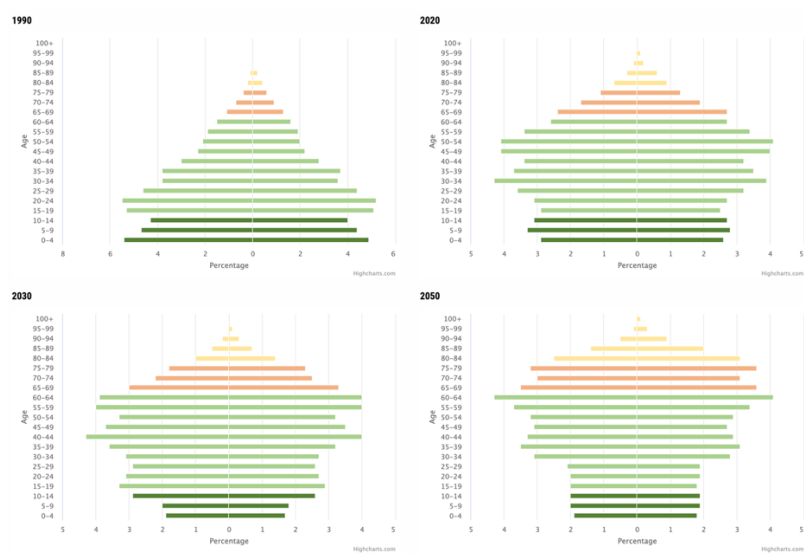
In the way that most economies are structured, People tend to be in 3 different stages of life; those that are in the learning and preparing stage, the working stage, and the retirement stage. People in their early ages start off by learning and getting an education. This prepares them to become a learning member of society. Once they complete their learning journey, they achieve a different level in society. The working ages. During this age, people start becoming employed, becoming an official working member of society. The work of this group of people funds the upbringing of the young, what previously was them, and the retired, what they will soon come to be. Once they achieve their final stage of retirement the government or your employer pays you for the service that you offered while you were working. Also known as a "pension." Previously, society in East Asia was able to run perfectly fine with this system because there were large numbers of members of the working class, while smaller numbers of those were outside of the working class. However, what would happen if these numbers were to switch? What if there were large numbers of those that are outside of the working class while there were high numbers of those that were a part of the working class? This causes a smaller number of people in the working class to provide for the larger number of people past their working age. With people in the working class having to provide for a larger number of people past the working class, each

member of the working class is pressured to provide for a larger number of retirees than the retirees needed to provide for during their time in the working class. Further preventing the birth of more babies. The very issue that East Asian countries face today (The Economist).

1.2 Recent Developments

Recently, countries such as Japan, Singapore, and Korea have taken the frontlines in finding solutions to their declining birth rates. These include methods such as financial and economic reform, the establishment of pro-natalist policies, and cultural shifts to promote larger families, addressing societal pressures to make parenthood more accessible and flexible. Additionally, technological advancements and decreased societal disdain for immigrants to increase immigration have also been explored as a solution, with some countries implementing policies to mitigate demographic challenges. Other controversial attempts at solving the issue of decreasing birth rates include China's fertility campaign, where they targeted girls between the ages of 15~49 (Hong).

As a result, aging has become a huge issue in East Asia. Below are graphs displaying the age distribution of East Asian countries ("East and North-East Asia | Demographic Changes").



However, these attempts to raise the birth rates have been unsuccessful. With countries such as Japan and Korea both failing to increase their constantly decreasing birth rates. Even with investments of \$75 billion (Japan) and \$200 billion (Korea) in hopes of doing so (Oi).

These attempts were made to prevent or at least mitigate the issues that arise when a population declines or ages. This includes labor shortages and a decrease in productivity, an increase in economic burden, and the potential for a recession. Labor shortages and a decrease in productivity rise as a result of decreasing birthrates. The reasoning for this issue is simply put, the fact that there will be fewer people to work. This causes people who previously would've been retired to still have to work to make up for the loss in the workforce (Kearney). Examples of this include countries in Europe where the majority of the countries have now increased their

retirement age to combat the impact of decreasing birth rates, leading to a number of protests (Rossi).

Key Terms

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) – The average number of children a woman bears in her lifetime. A TFR below 2.1 leads to a decrease in the total population, while a TFR above 2.1 leads to a population increase.

Ageing Population – An increase in the average age of a population. This often results in economic and social challenges.

Demographic Dividend – The potential economic boost caused by a large working-age population relative to dependents.

Labor Shortage – A lack of available workers, which hinders economic growth.

Family Policy – Government policies aimed at supporting families and encouraging childbirth, including childcare subsidies, parental leave, and tax benefits.

Immigration – The movement of people across borders to settle in a new country, potentially addressing labor shortages and population decline.

Interventionism – Government actions that directly impact the country's economy or political affairs. ("Interventionism Definition & Meaning | Britannica Dictionary")

Interventionist – Someone who supports interventionism.

Adaptationism– In the context of birthrates, adaptationism is defined as the philosophy that we should adjust for a smaller population, rather than to increase it. (Orzack and Forber)

Adaptationist– Someone who supports adaptationism.

Natalist – Promoting an increase in the population ("Merriam-Webster Dictionary")

2. Emphasis of the Discourse

2.1 Right-Wing Approach

Emphasis on cultural and traditional values: Right-wing perspectives often highlight the importance of traditional family structures and cultural norms in promoting higher birth rates. They may advocate for policies that strengthen marriage, discourage divorce, and promote religious values associated with larger families.

Focus on economic incentives: Right-wingers often support pro-natalist policies that offer financial incentives for childbirth, such as tax breaks, child allowances, and subsidies for childcare. They believe these measures can make parenthood more financially attractive and encourage couples to have more children.

Skepticism on immigration: Many on the right oppose large-scale immigration, viewing it as a threat to national identity and cultural cohesion. They may advocate for stricter border controls and policies that prioritize native-born citizens.

Concerns about population decline: Right-wing stances often express concerns about national security and the economic implications of a shrinking population. They argue that declining birth rates can weaken a country's military power and lead to economic stagnation.

2.2 Left Wing Approach

Focus on economic and social factors: Left-wing perspectives tend to emphasize the role of economic inequality, high housing costs, and inadequate childcare support in driving down birth rates. They advocate for policies that address these issues, such as progressive taxation, affordable housing initiatives, and expanded social safety nets.

Skeptical of pro-natalist policies: Many on the left express concerns about government intervention in personal reproductive choices. They argue that pro-natalist policies can be coercive and may disproportionately impact women and marginalized communities.

Openness to immigration: Left-wing stances often support facilitating immigration as a way to address labor shortages and demographic imbalances, viewing it as a more ethical and sustainable solution than pro-natalist policies.

2.3 Interventionist Approach

Interventionist stances on the issue of decreasing birth rates focus on finding ways to increase the birth rate through a series of methods. The first of which is to implement pro-natalist policies. These include financial support such as childcare subsidies, parental leave extensions, and tax benefits. ("What Can Governments Do about Falling Birth Rates?") Alleviating financial burdens placed on parents, which accounted as the main reason why half of Japanese citizens below the age of 30 were uninterested in having kids. (The Japan Times) Culturally, an interventionist solution is to address societal pressure and expectations that may discourage childbearing, whether it be long working hours, housing, or high education costs. (Nargund G) Additionally, technological innovations such as egg freezing and IVF advancements that make parenthood more accessible and flexible may also serve as potential solutions to this issue. (Gupta and Blum) The final and the most tested solution is increasing immigration. A solution that has already been tested in nations such as Japan, China, and Singapore, where a constant supply of new immigrants supporting the economy was proven to mitigate the aging of a population. (WORLD BANK)

However, it should be noted that there are flaws in these solutions. Solutions such as immigration only work when places that they are moving to provide brighter opportunities. This means that for immigration to continue, countries that the migrants are coming from will have to continue being worse off than the countries that migrants are emigrating to. Additionally, it should also be noted that immigrants do end up adjusting to society, meaning that in a few generations, there would be little cultural difference in birth. Furthermore, it should be noted that financial aid solutions require funding, which is generated by the younger population themselves.

2.4 Adaptationist Approach

Adaptationists believe that instead of finding ways to increase birth rates, we should focus on adapting to work with a smaller population. A proposed solution is economic restructuring through automation and robotics, considering them as essential tools to address labor shortages, especially in repetitive or physically demanding tasks. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates the displacement of up to 800 million jobs globally by 2030, with manual work being most at risk (Manyika et al., 2017). In anticipation of job displacement, adaptationists emphasize the importance of upskilling and retraining programs to equip existing workers with the necessary skills for a changing job market. In terms of retirement reforms, adaptationists propose raising retirement ages to supply the labor force with experienced workers, especially given that labor becomes increasingly less manual. (*LSE Undergraduate Admissions Assessment 2022 -English Section a (90-Minutes)*)

Focusing on the existing population, adaptationists stress the importance of investing in healthcare to enhance overall well-being and workforce productivity. By ensuring that all workers are healthy, employers and society benefit from workers with higher retention rates, higher levels of productivity, fewer work leaves, and longer careers. (for)

2.5 Stance of developed countries

Developed countries tend to be the ones who suffer from actively decreasing birth rates. (Bricker) This happens for a multitude of reasons. First is urbanization. With higher levels of gender equality and rates of women in the workforce, societal pressure expecting women to have both a career and a family proves to be a challenge. The issue is that when families or partnerships achieve financial stability, they start having difficulties in reproducing due to their age. ("Models of Development - Differences in Levels of Development between Developing Countries - Higher Geography Revision - BBC Bitesize") Evidence is that birth rates in G7 countries are less than half of the global average ("G7 Nations Stand out for Their Low Birth Rates, Aging Populations"). In terms of overall developed and developing countries, it should be noted that every minute, 240 children are born in lower-income countries. Whereas only 25 are birthed in higher-income countries. However, solutions are available ("Population Growth in Low vs. High Income Countries"). Especially with technological innovations such as that of IVFs and egg freezing. However, through the availability of these methods, people have only become more inclined to wait until they consider having kids. Further aging the total population. (Overpopulation Research Project).

2.6 Stance of developing countries

Developing countries share fewer instances where decreasing birthrates threaten their livelihood. This is due to a number of reasons. The first is traditional religious values. In many developing countries, children are seen as a gift from God and a blessing to the family. This belief leads to larger families and higher birth rates. Another reason is traditional masculinity and job roles. In many developing countries, men are expected to be the breadwinners of the family, and having many children is seen as a sign of virility and masculinity. This cultural dynamic that idolizes larger families motivates parents to create larger families, increasing birth rates. (Hayford and S. Philip Morgan) Poverty is another factor that contributes to high population growth. In

developing countries, children are seen as economic assets because of the increased income they can generate, especially in countries where the government does not punish parents for not sending their children to school. (Birdsall and Griffin) Children also provide old-age care to parents in developing countries where there is no social welfare/pensions.

However, there are negative reasons that lead to higher birth rates. Of them, the first is higher infant mortality rates. High infant mortality rates lead parents to have multiple kids, as some are expected to fail to survive. To elaborate, this means that if infant mortality rates were so high that half of infants failed to survive, parents would, on average, have to have 2 kids to have 1 surviving child. Additionally, issues such as unintended pregnancy play a role in higher birth rates being present in developing countries. (Larson)

3. Possible Solutions

3.1 In Favor of Developed Countries

Due to the power and higher economic capabilities developed countries have, they have the leverage and freedom to work with both interventionist and adaptationist solutions. This means that the developed nations have more solutions to work with. Of them, the first that comes to mind is adapting to a smaller workforce. Through technological and healthcare innovations, especially in countries such as Japan, Korea, Singapore, and China, automation and the use of robotics seem incredibly feasible. Especially given that these countries are considered to be global leaders in healthcare ("Best Healthcare in the World 2023"), as well as both hardware technology (CPUs, GPUs, etc.) and software innovation (programming, AI, etc.) (Keary) Another option that has been explored is the raising of retirement ages and developing age-friendly workplaces, something that has already been put into place and is starting to be placed in action in countries such as Korea. (OECD)

In terms of more interventionist approaches, developed countries have 3 main solutions. The first is to set financial support. This would include things such as childcare subsidies, extended parental leave, and tax benefits. Tackling the prevalent issue of financial burdens on parents, something that stands as the primary deterrent for many individuals (The Japan Times). From a cultural perspective, an effective interventionist approach involves addressing societal pressures and expectations that discourage childbearing. This includes addressing issues such as long working hours, housing challenges, and high education costs (Nargund G), as well as seemingly impossible societal expectations on both parents having both a successful career and family. Something that is simply impossible ("No, You Can't Have It All"). Other interventionist solutions, quite possibly the most tested, one notably in nations like Japan, China, and Singapore, involve boosting immigration. Demonstrated success reveals that a continuous influx of new immigrants plays a pivotal role in supporting the economy and mitigating the challenges associated with an aging population (WORLD BANK).

In terms of right/left-wing solutions, the preference of these solutions will depend on the culture of the country. Countries that hold more traditional values, will prefer that of right-winged solutions. These likely include nations such as Japan, Korea, and China. However, more liberal countries and countries that prefer change, will aim for left-winged solutions. Including nations such as the US, UK, and France.

3.2 In Favor of Developing Countries

Developing countries do not really suffer from decreasing birth rates. However, solutions used by developed countries to cope with the aging population issue may damage developing countries. One of the main reasons lies in immigration. It should be noted that immigrants migrate from their hometowns in hopes of a brighter future in a more developed country. However, this would mean that for a constant supply of migrants to come in, developing countries will have to constantly be outshined by developed countries. Furthermore, by developed nations taking the ambitious and talented individuals from developing countries, developing countries may face the consequences of a "brain drain" effect (Johnson) where developed countries are stripped of their young and brightest, further lengthening the socio-economic gap between already developed and developing countries.

Due to these factors, developing countries would prefer adaptationist approaches to solving this issue. This is attributed to a few main reasons. The first is that developing countries, simply have little to gain from solving the issue of decreasing birth rates. This is due to the fact developing countries do not suffer from this issue. Rather, they may actually lose their future generations due to a few interventionist solutions. Therefore, developing countries would benefit more from adaptationist approaches to solving the issue, a method that will allow them to stay uninvolved if possible, in an issue that does not greatly impact them while observing the developed countries' attempts at solving an issue that they may face themselves, in the near future.

4. Keep in Mind the Following

When researching about this topic keep in mind your country's involvement in this topic (do they suffer from decreasing birth rates, or do they possibly benefit from it), what cultural and societal expectations that country has on their citizens (specifically those aged between 15~30), the country's cultural stance on foreigners/immigrants, technological advancements, and the economic strength of that country. Below are a few questions to help guide your research:

1. *Country's Involvement*
 - a. *Does the country currently experience a decline in birth rates? If so, to what extent?*
 - b. *Has the country historically addressed issues related to declining birth rates? If so, how?*
 - c. *Are there any potential benefits or consequences for the country associated with decreasing birth rates?*
2. *Cultural and Societal Expectations*
 - a. *What cultural expectations exist in the country regarding family and career?*
 - b. *How do societal expectations impact the decisions of individuals who are or will soon be within childbearing age in regard to starting families?*
3. *Country's Cultural Stance on Foreigners/Immigrants*
 - a. *What is the country's cultural attitude towards foreigners and immigrants?*
 - b. *Are there any policies preventing or encouraging the immigration to your country?*
4. *Technological Advancements*
 - a. *How has technology, particularly in reproductive health and family planning, evolved in the country?*
 - b. *Are there technological solutions within the country, that help solve or mitigate the impacts of an aging population?*

5. *Economic Strength*
 - a. *What is the current economic strength of the country, and how does it correlate with population demographics?*
 - b. *Are there economic factors influencing decisions related to family planning and child-rearing, particularly among individuals aged 15 to 30?*
 - c. *What solutions, both adaptationist and interventionist, can the country support?*

5. Evaluation

The issue regarding decreasing birth rates is a modern issue and something these countries are experiencing for the first time since the 19th century (Bateman). Please note that all solutions have their flaws, and each better aligns with certain approaches to solve the issue. However, do not limit yourselves to these solutions. The approaches written in this chair report should merely serve as stepping blocks that sprout the creativity within delegates to come up with unprecedented solutions. In order to do so, it is essential that you delve into the convoluted roots of this issue and get a grasp of the entire picture. This will not be an easy task, but through careful cogitation, I am confident that you will be able to unravel this intricate issue.

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