

## Fewer people = lower living standards

**Level:** Intermediate (B1-B2)

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes

**Overview:** This article discusses the economic impact of declining birth rates on the world's most prosperous economies.

**Business topic:** Effects of demographics on economies

**Business language:** Useful vocabulary, business-related phrases

**Activities:** Key words, understanding the article, business language (phrases), discussion about the birth rate and the economy in your country, presentation on population trends and their effects on the economy in your country

**Groups:** whole class, pairs, small groups

### 1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss their opinions about the questions either as a whole class or in small groups. Encourage them to give reasons for their opinions.

### 2. Key words

- a. Ask students to match the words with the definitions. When they have finished, ask them to read the whole article carefully and to look at how the key words are used in context. Point out that the paragraph numbers are listed after the words to help them locate the words quickly.

**Key:**

- |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>shrink</i>   | 6. <i>dent</i>     |
| 2. <i>lever</i>    | 7. <i>pace</i>     |
| 3. <i>stagnate</i> | 8. <i>enhance</i>  |
| 4. <i>fall</i>     | 9. <i>stark</i>    |
| 5. <i>boost</i>    | 10. <i>witness</i> |

### 3. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to read the article and then choose T (true) or F (false) for each statement. Encourage them to read the whole article first and then to scan it to find the information for each item. When you check answers, ask them to correct the false statements.

**Key:**

1. T
2. T
3. F (Paragraphs 1 and 2 say that many of the richest economies will have to increase productivity to maintain increases in the standard of living because of falling birth rates.)
4. T
5. F (Paragraphs 2,3 and 7 state that birth rates are falling in Japan, China, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece and other European countries.)
6. F (Paragraphs 10 and 14 say that young people will have to have longer working lives.)
7. F (Paragraph 13 says that there is no evidence that AI and robotics are increasing productivity.)
8. T

- b. Ask students to choose the answers to the questions based on the information in the article. Remind them to read each option carefully before choosing the answer. Tell them they may want to look back at the article to check their answers when they have finished.

**Key:**

1. A
2. C
3. B
4. C

### 4. Business Language – phrases

- a. Ask students to match the words in the two columns to form phrases. When they have finished, they should scan the article to find the phrases and look at how they are used in context.

**Key:**

1. *per capita*
2. *living standards*
3. *labour force participation rate*
4. *flow of wealth*
5. *productivity growth*
6. *economic impact*
7. *birth rate*
8. *shoulder the cost*

- b. Ask students to write the phrases from task a next to their definitions. When you check the answers, make sure that students understand all of the definitions.

**Key:**

1. *living standards*
2. *birth rate*
3. *shoulder the costs*
4. *labour force participation rate*
5. *per capita*
6. *flow of wealth*
7. *economic impact*
8. *productivity growth*

## 5. Discussion

- a. Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. Encourage them to consider each point in the list and to think of examples to support their opinions. For example, did their parents or grandparents have the same or fewer working hours than most people do now? Did they have the same benefits and working conditions as people do now? When they have finished, bring the whole class back together so that they can share and compare their ideas and decide whether they think the standard of living has improved from past generations.

Find out whether they think the birth rate is now increasing or decreasing from past generations and why they think this is happening. Encourage them to give evidence for their opinions, e.g. *My grandmother had nine siblings, but I have only two siblings. My friends' families are similar. I think it's because most couples today prefer not to have kids.*

## 6. Wider business theme – effects of population levels on the economy

- a. Ask students to read the short text about population trends in the US, the UK and Europe. Then put them into pairs or small groups to discuss the questions. After a few minutes, open the discussion to the whole class to see if most people have similar answers.
- b. Ask students to continue working in their groups or in pairs. Encourage them to assign roles to each person, e.g. in a group of three, each student could research one of the questions. Remind them to use reliable sources for their research and to take notes on the information they find.
- c. Ask students to prepare a report on the information they found. Point out that they may want to create some graphs to illustrate trends in birth rates and/or trends and predictions for the GDP of their country. When they have finished their reports, have each group or pair present their report to the class. Give them some time to practise their presentations and encourage them to use some of the useful language provided.