

Fewer people = lower living standards

Level: Advanced (C1-C2)

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 birthrate 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. witness | 8. fourfold |
| 2. GDP | 9. enhance |
| 3. boost | 10. stagnate |
| 4. stark | 11. erode |
| 5. lever | 12. amid |
| 6. OECD | 13. hold |
| 7. dent | 14. pace |

- b. Ask students to use words from task a to complete the sentences. Point out that not all of the words will be used and remind them that they will have to change the forms of some of the words so that they are grammatically correct in the sentences. When you go over the answers, make sure that students understand all of the sentences and the key words.

Key:

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1. stark | 6. hold |
| 2. boost | 7. pace |
| 3. erodes | 8. amid |
| 4. dent | 9. stagnated |
| 5. levers | 10. witness |

3. Understanding the article

- a. Ask student to read the article again before they try to answer the questions. You could do this activity individually in writing, or you may prefer to do it as a discussion in pairs or groups or as a class. When you go over the answers, ask students to scan the article to find the evidence for each answer. Some of the answers may come from more than one paragraph.

Key:

Suggested answers:

1. There are fewer people to take jobs, and a smaller workforce will have to support a large number of retired people.
2. For many people, it's too expensive to have children because things like housing and childcare are too expensive. Also, fewer young people are in relationships than in the past.
3. It means the average number of children that a woman would have to have in order to maintain the same population.
4. In Europe, productivity has stagnated since the (COVID) pandemic even though AI and robotics are used quite a lot now.
5. Populations would have to increase, or young people would have to start working at an earlier age and retire at a later age, and/or people would need to work more hours.

4. Business Language – phrases

- a. Ask students to use the phrases in the box to complete the sentences. Encourage them to scan the article to look at how each phrase is used in context before completing the sentences. When you check the answers, make the students understand both the phrases themselves and the sentences they are used in.

Key:

1. *Living standards*
2. *birth rate*
3. *shoulder the cost*
4. *labour force participation*
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 ask them 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 to decide whether in general, 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. Ask 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.* Encourage them to speculate on the possible reasons for any changes, e.g. *Young people are working on their careers and are getting married later, so they tend to have fewer children.*

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. Ask them if they have observed any other trends in younger generations. They may have mentioned some in the previous activity.
- b. Ask students to continue working in their groups or pairs. Encourage them to assign roles to each person, e.g. in a group of three, each student could research one of the points in the list. 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. Explain that they should use their data to come to a conclusion about their probable standard of living in 30 years. 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.