



## Population Expert Predicts World's Elderly Will Soon Outnumber Children

In an article published by Inter Press Service (IPS) on August 8, Joseph Chamie — who was once the director of the United Nations Population Division — noted the increasing number of nations worldwide where there is a “demographic turning point” occurring where children in a population become fewer than its elderly. Chamie, who recently retired as director of research at the Center for Migration Studies, where he also edited the journal *International Migration Review*, calls that demographic turning point the “Historic Reversal.”



Chamie noted that this turning point first occurred in Italy in 1995 and by 2000 the “Historic Reversal” had also taken place in six more countries — Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Japan, Portugal, and Spain. Since then, more nations have joined their ranks, bringing the total to 30 and including most of the countries in the European Union. Furthermore, writes Chamie, that number is expected to nearly double by 2031 and will include Australia, Canada, China, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. This change departs dramatically from the historic pattern, observed the demographer, who has more than a quarter century of experience in his field and is regarded as an expert in fertility, population estimates, and projections. He notes that, historically, children far outnumbered the elderly. As recently as 1965, when the world’s population was 3.3 billion, there was an average of more than seven children under age 15 for each person aged 65 and over.

Back then, Africa led in that category with more than 14 children per elderly person, followed by Asia and Latin America with more than 11 children per elderly person, and Europe and Northern America at approximately three children per elderly person.

Chamie noted that today, with the world population at 7.4 billion people, the worldwide average is down to about three children per elderly person. Africa continues to have the highest ratio with nearly 12 children per elderly person, but Asia and Latin America are “close to the current world average.” Europe, which just recently experienced the “Historical Reversal,” has dropped to an abysmally low level of “slightly less than one child per elderly person.”

However, even bigger shifts toward the “Historic Reversal” are coming, writes Chamie:

By 2075 the world’s projected population of 10.7 billion is expected to pass through the Historic Reversal with elderly persons becoming increasingly more numerous than children (Figure 1). The only major region that will not experience the Historic Reversal during the 21st century is Africa, which is projected to have 1.5 children per elderly person in 2100 with some countries, such as Niger, Nigeria and Somalia, having more than twice as many children as elderly. At that time, all the other major regions of the world are expected to have about twice as many elderly persons as



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children. [Graphs are shown in the article.]

Chamie identified what is probably the most frequently discussed problem related to the demographic change — how countries will sustain their social security programs when there are not enough workers to support the increasing number of retirees:

In particular, population aging presents a major challenge to government old age pension systems with more elderly beneficiaries and relatively fewer workers contributing to support them. To sustain pension programs for the elderly, countries have a number of options at their disposal.

Among the options Chamie summarizes are proposals that everyone has heard discussed, especially during political campaigns, such as increasing taxes, redirecting government revenue, reducing social security benefits, or privatizing old-age pension programs. He correctly observes that those options have not been met with enthusiasm by the general public, and especially the elderly.

There is little wonder why that is so. No one wants to pay more taxes, those receiving social security (and even those anticipating receiving it some day) certainly do not want to see benefits reduced, and redirecting government revenue is simply an obvious example of “creative” accounting. In practice; revenue has usually been redirected *away* from Social Security to pay for other government programs, leaving the Social Security trust fund with a pile of I.O.U.s

Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) condemned such transfers away from the Social Security trust fund to other areas of government in a speech last November in which he said: “Stealing money from people who will be getting money in the future to pay for immediate concerns is robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

An article in *The New American* in 2011 discussed how another option that Chamie apparently dismissed out of hand — privatizing Social Security — actually worked when put into practice, noting: “Chile’s 30-year experiment is succeeding beyond expectations.” Such a plan has never come close to being put into effect in the United States because whenever they have been discussed, such proposals have been drowned out by political rhetoric and fear mongering campaigns.

Chamie also discusses other options to save old-age pension programs in the “Historic Reversal” countries, including adding immigrant workers, but thankfully notes the downside of that proposal: “Eventually those workers also age, join the elderly population and rely on government pension programs.”

He also is pessimistic about the obvious long-term solution, encouraging a rise in the birth rate, writing: “Even if fertility rates were to rise, which seem unlikely in the near term, it would take a couple of decades before the additional children could join the work force.”

Looking just at the United States, which is projected to reach the “Historic Reversal” in 2031, we might first look at what was responsible for the dramatic drop in our birth rate following the major “baby boom” from 1946–1964 (as millions of World War II veterans returned home and started families), when the number of annual births exceeded 2 per 100 women (or approximately 1 percent of the total population). The baby boom ended almost as quickly as it started. G.D. Searle and Company put the Enovid oral contraceptive pill on the market in 1960 and in less than two years, 1.2 million women were taking it. By 1965, that number had increased to over five million women.

The effect of the introduction of the birth control pill and the decline in the U.S. birth rate was apparent. In each year from 1954 to 1964, more than four million births were recorded in the United States. And the birth rates per 1,000 people ranged from 25.3 in 1954 to 21.0 in 1964. Both numbers



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started declining as the number of women using oral contraception started rising, with the figure 10 years later (1974) being 3.1 million births and the birth rate falling to 14.9. (Sources: Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics.)

Another factor impacting the decline in U.S. births was the increase in the number of abortions in the United States since the *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court decision of 1973 deprived the states of their right to prohibit abortions. While this decision had little apparent impact on the number of births or the birth rate, that is likely because a significant number of women were now using abortion as a form of contraception. Nevertheless, the number of unborn babies who never got a chance to be born has been astounding. A report in LifeNews.com in January noted that more than 58 million babies have been aborted since *Roe v Wade*. That number does not take into account the millions of aborted girls who, by now, would have reached childbearing age and had children of their own.

A reversal in our nation's headlong race to become another "Historic Reversal" nation might easily be stemmed by several changes in governmental policies. Aside from the obvious solution of reversing *Roe v. Wade*, changes in our tax laws might encourage more women to decide to become mothers instead of postponing motherhood to remain in the workforce. A reduction in government spending to constitutional limits would result in a reduction of the total tax burden on families that is often the reason women are forced to go to work in the first place. Many women work to offset the family's taxes while the husband's income pays for the necessities of life. Another major change might be to make our taxes more "family friendly" — by increasing the basic deduction allowed for each child, and by making more of the expenses of raising children (such as educational expenses) tax deductible.

Americans cannot prevent the rest of the world from reaching the "Historic Reversal" point, but we can change our government's policies to make having children and raising families an easier endeavor — which might prevent our nation from following the pack.

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