



Written by [John Larabell](#) on March 22, 2024

The Lancet: Global Birthrates Declining, Government Needs to Act

According to a [study published March 20](#) by esteemed peer-reviewed medical journal *The Lancet*, global fertility rates saw a sharp decline between 1950 and 2021.

The study, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and using , noted that there were 92.7 million live births globally in 1950. Live births peaked in 2016 at 142 million, and had declined to 129 million by 2021.

The study concluded,

Fertility is declining globally, with rates in more than half of all countries and territories in 2021 below replacement level. Trends since 2000 show considerable heterogeneity in the steepness of declines, and only a small number of countries experienced even a slight fertility rebound after their lowest observed rate, with none reaching replacement level.

Additionally, the distribution of livebirths across the globe is shifting, with a greater proportion occurring in the lowest-income countries. Future fertility rates will continue to decline worldwide and will remain low even under successful implementation of pro-natal policies. These changes will have far-reaching economic and societal consequences due to ageing populations and declining workforces in higher-income countries, combined with an increasing share of livebirths among the already poorest regions of the world.



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Furhtermore, the study noted,

Our past estimates and future forecasts indicate that fertility rates are declining everywhere



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and are projected to continue to decrease over the coming century. By 2100, we estimate that fertility rates will be below replacement level in more than 95% of the world's countries and territories but that marked disparities in rates will remain.

While the *Lancet* study predicted that all regions of the world will see below-replacement-level birth rates by 2100, it noted that most of the live births by 2100 will come from impoverished areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, adding that these shifts can be “ameliorated by improved female education and met need for modern contraception.” Such a recommendation squares with the population-control bent of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the funder of the study.

Further illustrative of the mindset that governments around the world must act to mitigate any negative affects of declining birthrates, the study claimed, “most of the world's countries will experience the repercussions of low fertility, with ageing populations, declining workforces, and inverted population pyramids, which are likely to lead to profound fiscal, economic, and social consequences. National policy makers and the global health community must plan to address these divided sets of demographic challenges emerging worldwide.”

Though the study recommends governments implement pro-natal policies in countries with very low birth rates, it emphasizes that such policies should not include restrictions on abortion or contraceptives. It also points out that declining birth rates could have positive environmental consequences:

Although sustained below-replacement fertility will pose serious potential challenges for much of the world over the course of the century, it also presents opportunities for environmental progress. Alongside strong pro-environmental regulations, a smaller global population in the future could alleviate some strain on global food systems, fragile environments, and other finite resources, and also reduce carbon emissions.

The study concludes with a note about shifts in geopolitical realities stemming from changes in fertility levels and birthrates, again recommending government action: “Future trends in fertility rates and livebirths will propagate shifts in global population dynamics, driving changes to international relations and a geopolitical environment, and highlighting new challenges in migration and global aid networks. All of these issues will necessitate focused and collaborative work to address.”



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