

Number of Japanese children at record low

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The number of children in Japan has fallen to its lowest number since records began. There were 170,000 fewer children in Japan at the end of March 2018 than there were a year earlier. Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and

Communications issued a report on Friday showing the falling numbers of children. According to the statistics, the number of children aged 14 or under dropped for the 37th consecutive year. There was another record fall in the ratio of children to the overall Japanese population. This dropped to a new record low of 12.3 per cent and was the 44th year of decline in a row. This ratio is the lowest among countries in the world with a population of 40 million or more.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been trying to address the country's dwindling birth rate. He has introduced several measures to encourage lower-income families to have bigger families. However, these measures seem to be having little success. This is coupled with the fact that fewer Japanese people are getting married, which demographers say is a "ticking time-bomb" for Japan. The number of annual births in 2016 fell below one million for the first time since the government began collecting data in 1899. Japanese demographers predict that by 2050, Japan will have 23 per cent fewer citizens. This means a rapidly aging society and a greatly diminishing workforce.

Sources: nikkei.com / xinhuanet.com / scmp.com

Writing

Governments need to do more to encourage bigger families. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

children / Japan / records / statistics / consecutive / population / decline / low / ratio / address / birth rate / measures / lower-income / success / annual / demographers

True / False

- The number of children in Japan fell by 170,000 in 2017. T / F
- The number of under-14s fell for the 37th year in a row. T / F
- The ratio of children to the whole Japanese population hit a record low. T / F
- Japan has the lowest ratio of children to the population in the world. T / F
- Japan's leader has been very successful in increasing the birth rate. T / F
- The number of babies born each year is always over one million. T / F
- Japan's government began collecting data on births in 1899. T / F
- There could be 23% fewer Japanese citizens by the year 2050. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. fallen | a. falling |
| 2. records | b. released |
| 3. issued | c. consecutively |
| 4. statistics | d. actions |
| 5. in a row | e. documentation |
| 6. address | f. forecast |
| 7. dwindling | g. deal with |
| 8. measures | h. dropped |
| 9. predict | i. considerably |
| 10. greatly | j. facts and figures |

Discussion – Student A

- How useful and important are children?
- What problems are there with a falling birth rate?
- What's the best number of children to have?
- How can Japan's government increase the birth rate?
- Is a shrinking population a good thing?
- What more should governments do for children?
- What things about children annoy you?
- What was it like being a child?

Breaking News English - The Mini Lesson

Phrase Match

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. its lowest number since | a. to the statistics |
| 2. There were 170,000 | b. numbers |
| 3. falling | c. for the first time |
| 4. According | d. birth rate |
| 5. This dropped to a new | e. measures |
| 6. address the country's dwindling | f. workforce |
| 7. He has introduced several | g. records began |
| 8. a ticking | h. record low |
| 9. fell below one million | i. time-bomb |
| 10. a greatly diminishing | j. fewer children |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- How can a leader encourage couples to have more children?
- What support does your government give to families?
- Why do you think fewer Japanese people are getting married?
- Why is a low birth rate a "ticking time-bomb"?
- What things about children make you smile?
- What problems does an ageing workforce create?
- What questions would you like to ask Japan's prime minister?

Spelling

- According to the tctsitasis
- for the 37th ectcovnuesi year
- the lvaerol Japanese population
- the 44th year of incldee
- This aotri is the lowest
- a population of 40 mnilloi
- the country's ldidginnw birth rate
- introduced several uremaess
- uoepLCD with the fact that
- The number of launan births in 2016 fell
- 23 per cent fewer itsnzice
- a greatly nidsngihimi workforce

Answers – Synonym Match

1. h	2. e	3. b	4. j	5. c
6. g	7. a	8. d	9. f	10. i

Role Play

Role A – Better Healthcare

You think better healthcare is the best way to deal with a shrinking population. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): increased immigration, stopping emigration or downsizing the economy.

Role B – Increased Immigration

You think increased immigration is the best way to deal with a shrinking population. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): better healthcare, stopping emigration or downsizing the economy.

Role C – Stop Emigration

You think stopping emigration is the best way to deal with a shrinking population. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): increased immigration, better healthcare or downsizing the economy.

Role D – Downsize the Economy

You think downsizing the economy is the best way to deal with a shrinking population. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): increased immigration, stopping emigration or better healthcare.

Speaking – Population

Rank these with your partner. Put the best ways to address a shrinking population at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • stop emigration | • better healthcare |
| • more working visas | • increased immigration |
| • downsize the economy | • procreation campaign |
| • free schooling | • tax breaks for big families |

Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	T	d	F	e	F	f	F	g	T	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.