Global Fertility Falls Below Replacement

Original article

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A new study suggests humanity is having too few children to replace itself. Elon Musk calls it "the end of civilisation." Marxists have long understood why capitalism produces this result.

Details. A preprint study concludes that the global total fertility rate (TFR) has fallen below replacement level to 2.19. This trend affected not only wealthy nations but “middle- and low-income” countries too. The paper projects global population will begin to decline around 2056.

► In an attempt to explain the drop, the study resorts to reactionary framing, blaming "modernity" while explicitly stating this does not mean capitalism, and recommending a return to a more "traditional" way of life in which children are cheap to raise and childlessness is less appealing.

► US trillionaire Elon Musk responded on X to a supporter of the study’s main thesis, stating that he “has been warning about this for years”.

Context. Musk has previously posted that low birth rates "will end civilisation," donated $10 million to fertility research, and urged wealthy men to have as many children as possible, believing wealth is directly linked to intelligence. He dismisses the cost of raising children as the primary cause of the decline.

► Former Hungarian PM Orbán expressed concern about Europe's low fertility trend while also criticising immigration. Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen proposed deregulating Big Tech to combat "depopulation," while US Vice President JD Vance suggested that parents should get more votes in elections than childless adults.

► In 2024, the French government declared “demographic rearmament” to bring the birth rate back up. Historically, capitalist states pursued similar growth policies in preparation for WW2. Italy launched the “Battle of Births” in 1927, aiming to boost population by 20 million – explicitly to “create a generation of soldiers”.

Important to Know. Over 150 years ago, Marx identified a capitalist law of population. As capital accumulates, more goes into machinery than wages, leaving a permanent and growing "reserve army" of unemployed that suppresses wages and living standards. This impoverishment now suppresses birth rates as workers struggle to afford living costs even just for themselves

► In 2026, raising a child in the US until age 18 costs a middle-income family (earning ~$87,000 per year) more than $300,000. Middle-income families currently earn 20% less than needed to afford a median home. In 2025, 58% of adults aged 18-24 lived with their parents, while US youth unemployment stands at 8.50%.

► Capitalists fear declining fertility rates because it threatens to decrease this body of “surplus workers”, as well as shrinking the consumer market. Furthermore, in case of imperialist wars, capitalists need a large reserve of workers to be used as cannon fodder.

► To combat this decline, capitalists have unsuccessfully combined limited social-democratic reforms with outright repression of women. Poland pairs a near-total abortion ban with child benefits, yet fertility has kept sliding. Sweden

offers extensive parental support with no abortion restrictions, but its rate has fallen just as steadily.

► Women bear a dual burden under capitalism as both workers creating surplus value and primary caretakers of the next generation of workers. When demographic interests demand it, this role is targeted directly. Decades of hard-won reproductive rights are being overturned to produce future workers and soldiers.

► Under socialism, the population grows steadily without the formation of surplus workers. The planned economy guarantees full employment and steady improvements in living conditions. Parents retained their careers through socialised housework and childcare, and received paid parental leave. The USSR demonstrated the highest net population growth of any major nation just after its successful socialist construction, averaging 2 million annually from 1926 to 1939.

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