

## Number of children in Japan at record low



7th May, 2014

The number of children in Japan aged 14 and under is the lowest ever. Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

released figures yesterday, just before the country's Children's Day national holiday on May the 5th. The figures show that the number of children in Japan fell by 160,000 from the previous year. It is the 33rd year in a row for the birth rate to decrease. There are 13 million fewer children in Japan today than there were in 1950. The Ministry said that out of 30 countries with a population of over 40 million, Japan has the smallest percentage of kids. Children make up 12.8 per cent of Japan's population. In France, the figure is 18.5 per cent and in the United States, it is 19.5 per cent.

While the number of children in Japan is going down, the number of old people is increasing. The over-65s now make up a record 25.6 per cent of the Japanese population. The government has warned that these trends will continue for decades to come. It said the proportion of people aged 65 or over could reach nearly 40 per cent in 2060. This will make life in Japan almost impossible for young, working people. They will have to pay much higher taxes to support the over-65s. The Japanese economy will also be in big trouble because there will not be enough young people to work. Japan's government has tried many things to get people to have more babies, but nothing seems to be working.

Sources: *The Japan Times* / *The Guardian* / *Bangkok Post*

## Writing

*Having many children is better than having just a few. Discuss.*

## Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

*children / communications / figures / previous year / in a row / birth rate / population / old people / government / decades / impossible / economy / big trouble / babies*

## True / False

- The number of children under 14 in Japan is the lowest ever. T / F
- There were only 160,000 births in Japan last year. T / F
- The birth rate has been falling for over 40 years. T / F
- Children make up almost 20 percent of population in the USA. T / F
- Just over a quarter of Japan's population is over 65. T / F
- The over-65s could be 40% of Japan's population by 2060. T / F
- There will always be enough young people to do jobs. T / F
- Japan's projects to get people to have more babies are working. T / F

## Synonym Match

- |               |                        |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. ever       | a. numbers             |
| 2. released   | b. attempted           |
| 3. figures    | c. going up            |
| 4. in a row   | d. issued              |
| 5. decrease   | e. advised             |
| 6. increasing | f. go down             |
| 7. warned     | g. in history          |
| 8. support    | h. having an effect    |
| 9. tried      | i. one after the other |
| 10. working   | j. look after          |

## Discussion – Student A

- How important are children to a country?
- What do you think of the record low number of children in Japan?
- What's the best number of children for a couple to have?
- Is it too expensive to have more than a few children?
- What are the reasons for falling birth rates?
- Is it better to have just a few siblings or many?
- How many children do (or did) you want?
- Is having children as important today as it was 100 years ago?

## Phrase Match

- |                                   |                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The number of children         | a. will continue         |
| 2. the lowest                     | b. children in Japan     |
| 3. fell by 160,000 from           | c. to be working         |
| 4. There are 13 million fewer     | d. 65s                   |
| 5. Children make up 12.8 per cent | e. ever                  |
| 6. The over-                      | f. in Japan aged 14      |
| 7. these trends                   | g. much higher taxes     |
| 8. for decades                    | h. the previous year     |
| 9. have to pay                    | i. to come               |
| 10. nothing seems                 | j. of Japan's population |

## Discussion – Student B

- What are the advantages of an ageing population?
- How can Japan reverse this trend?
- How can a country survive if it is full of old people?
- Should Japan increase the retirement age to 75?
- What kind of trouble might the Japanese economy be in?
- How can the government avoid economic problems?
- What do you think the government should do to get couples to have more babies?
- What questions would you ask the Japanese leader about this?

## Spelling

- the oswlet ever
- ... released ersgifu yesterday
- oaanilnt holiday
- ... for the birth rate to ecaesred
- Japan has the smallest epcergtnae
- 12.8 per cent of Japan's lappnoituo
- the number of old people is csrieanngi
- these sdttrne will continue
- for saeecdd to come
- pay much higher atexs
- uptoprs the over-65s
- The Japanese emoocyn

### Answers – Synonym Match

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

## Role Play

### Role A – Cash bonus for each baby

You think a cash bonus for each baby is the best way to get couples to have more children. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their ideas. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): a free home helper, longer paid maternity leave or free lifetime education.

### Role B – Free home helper

You think a free home helper is the best way to get couples to have more children. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their ideas. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): a cash bonus for each baby, longer paid maternity leave or free lifetime education.

### Role C – Longer paid maternity leave

You think longer paid maternity leave is the best way to get couples to have more children. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their ideas. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): a free home helper, a cash bonus for each baby or free lifetime education.

### Role D – Free lifetime education

You think free lifetime education is the best way to get couples to have more children. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them things that are wrong with their ideas. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): a free home helper, longer paid maternity leave or a cash bonus for each baby.

## Speaking – More babies

Rank these with your partner. Put the best ideas to get couples to have more babies at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                    |                                |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| • cash bonuses     | • a daily helper from 4 babies |
| • free health care | • free education to university |
| • more holidays    | • award from the government    |
| • free house       | • other _____                  |

### Answers – True False

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