

## Japan's population falls three million in five years

1st June 2026



The population of Japan has fallen by over three million in the past five years. This is the largest drop since records began in 1920. Japan's internal affairs ministry has released preliminary figures for its 2025 census. This demographic

survey is conducted every five years. The latest one reveals that the number of residents in October 2025 was 123,049,524. This was a drop of 3,096,575 from the 2020 survey — a fall of 2.5 per cent. The census is the third in a row to show a decrease. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary said: "It was confirmed again that the population decline is advancing even further." He vowed to promote "comprehensive measures" to address the downturn.

The government attributed the decline to various factors. These included historically low birth rates. In 2025, there were around 706,000 births in Japan. This compared to around 2.5 million annual births during the postwar baby boom. Successive governments have introduced many measures to encourage couples to have babies. They have expanded child allowances, increased parental leave, and subsidized early years education. However, these have had little success. Japan is one of the world's oldest societies. The increasingly greying population is putting considerable strain on healthcare systems, pensions, and the labour force.

Sources: [nhk.or.jp](https://nhk.or.jp) / [japantoday.com](https://japantoday.com) / [yomiuri.co.jp](https://yomiuri.co.jp)

### Writing

Shrinking populations are good for the world. Discuss.

### Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

population / five years / records / demographic / survey / residents / census / decline government / birth rates / baby boom / couples / parental leave / subsidies / pension

### True / False

- 1) The drop in Japan's population is the biggest since records began. T / F
- 2) Japan conducts a demographic survey once a decade. T / F
- 3) The decline in population was over three per cent. T / F
- 4) It is the fourth consecutive census that has shown a fall in population. T / F
- 5) Japan is experiencing a fall in its birth rate it has not seen before. T / F
- 6) During the postwar baby boom, 2.5 million babies were born every year. T / F
- 7) Japan has taken many successful measures to increase its population. T / F
- 8) Japan's ageing population has negative effects on the pension system. T / F

### Synonym Match

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

- |                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1. <b>preliminary</b>   | a. pressure      |
| 2. <b>conducted</b>     | b. steps         |
| 3. <b>in a row</b>      | c. deal with     |
| 4. <b>vowed</b>         | d. consecutively |
| 5. <b>address</b>       | e. handouts      |
| 6. <b>attributed</b>    | f. initial       |
| 7. <b>measures</b>      | g. workers       |
| 8. <b>allowances</b>    | h. promised      |
| 9. <b>strain</b>        | i. carried out   |
| 10. <b>labour force</b> | j. accredited    |

### Discussion – Student A

- a) Are there too many or too few people in your country?
- b) What do you think of the size of the global population?
- c) What problems come with overpopulation?
- d) Why has the world's population increased so much?
- e) What problems come with shrinking populations?
- f) Are shrinking populations good for the environment?
- g) What measures can countries take to address shrinking populations?
- h) What will the world's population be like a century from now?

## Phrase Match

- |                                    |                          |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. released preliminary            | a. row                   |
| 2. demographic                     | b. on healthcare systems |
| 3. the third in a                  | c. address the downturn  |
| 4. population decline is advancing | d. force                 |
| 5. comprehensive measures to       | e. boom                  |
| 6. attributed the decline          | f. even further          |
| 7. historically low birth          | g. figures               |
| 8. during the postwar baby         | h. rates                 |
| 9. putting considerable strain     | i. survey                |
| 10. the labour                     | j. to various factors    |

## Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- Why are birth rates so low in many countries?
- What can governments do to encourage couples to have children?
- What do you think about maternal and paternal leave?
- What are the problems of ageing societies?
- What are your concerns about your old age?
- Should retirement ages increase to 80?
- What questions would you like to ask Japan's government?

## Spelling

- Japan's internal affairs ytiimnsr
- ipmrareinly figures
- crdmhgiopea survey
- the number of esnresidt
- the suecsn is the third in a row
- pmoehsrvecnei measures
- udteitatr the decline to various factors
- csciuvsees governments
- They have expanded child casloenlwa
- isbiusezdd early years education
- nrecedsboila strain on healthcare systems
- iespsoonn and the labour force

### Answers – Synonym Match

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

## Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions. (Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	When did Japan first start to keep population records?
2.	How often does Japan conduct a population census?
3.	What was the fall in population as a percentage?
4.	How many censuses in a row now show a population fall?
5.	What did the government promise to promote?
6.	What did the government attribute the drop to?
7.	How many babies were born in Japan in 2025?
8.	What happened in the postwar years?
9.	What has the government subsidized?
10.	What is the ageing population straining besides pensions and healthcare?

## Speaking – Depopulation

Rank these with your partner. Put the most worrying things at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| • Fewer babies    | • Emptying villages     |
| • High taxes      | • Bus services stopping |
| • Shop closures   | • People living alone   |
| • Nurse shortages | • Fewer workers         |

### Answers – True False

1	T	2	F	3	F	4	F	5	T	6	T	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.