

South Korea's Birth Rate Rising

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **fertility rate** (noun) /fər'tɪl.ə.ti reɪt/ - The average number of children born to a woman during her lifetime.
Example: The country's fertility rate is well below the level needed to maintain its population.
2. **demographic** (adjective) /,dem.ə'græf.ɪk/ - Relating to the structure of populations.
Example: The government is trying to address the demographic challenges of an aging population.
3. **incentive** (noun) /ɪn'sen.tɪv/ - A thing that motivates or encourages one to do something.
Example: The company offered a financial incentive to employees who met their sales targets.
4. **rebound** (verb) /rɪ'baʊnd/ - To recover in value, amount, or strength after a decrease or decline.
Example: The stock market is expected to rebound after a difficult period.
5. **sustainability** (noun) /sə'steɪ.nə'bɪl.ə.ti/ - The ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level.
Example: The sustainability of the new policy is a major concern for experts.
6. **societal** (adjective) /sə'saɪ.ə.təl/ - Relating to society or social relations.
Example: The changes in family structures are a result of broader societal shifts.
7. **pivotal** (adjective) /'pɪv.ə.təl/ - Of crucial importance in relation to the development or success of something else.
Example: This pivotal moment in history changed the course of the country.



South Korea has recently seen a significant rebound in its birth rate for the first time in nine years. According to official data, the total fertility rate increased to 0.75 in 2024 from 0.72 in 2023. While this is still the lowest in the world, the rise has given some hope to a country grappling with a severe demographic crisis. The increase is largely attributed to a post-pandemic surge in marriages that had been delayed.

The South Korean government has also played a pivotal role by offering various incentives to encourage couples to have children. These policies include increased parental leave benefits, subsidies for childcare, and financial support for housing. The government is also making it mandatory for companies to provide childcare-related statistics, hoping to create a more family-friendly workplace. These efforts aim to change long-standing societal norms that have traditionally seen women prioritize career over family.

Despite the positive news, experts caution against assuming a long-term trend reversal. The rebound is seen by many as a temporary blip rather than a permanent solution to the low birth rate. The sustainability of the increase is questioned due to persistent issues like high living costs, intense educational competition, and a challenging job market. Therefore, while the recent data is a welcome development, significant structural reforms are still needed to address the fundamental issues causing the birth rate decline.

DISCUSSION

1. What are the most significant factors in your country that influence a couple's decision to have children?
2. Do you think government incentives can truly solve a country's low birth rate, or are deeper societal changes needed?
3. If you were a policymaker, what is one creative or unique policy you would implement to encourage people to start families?
4. How might a continuously low birth rate affect a country's economy and social services in the future?
5. What are some ways a society can balance the pursuit of career success with the desire to raise a family?
6. Do you think the recent increase in South Korea's birth rate will be a lasting trend? Why or why not?