



# **Economic and Social Council**

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## **SIMULATION 2024**

**COMMITTEE GUIDE**

**ECOSOC**

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## 1. Presidents' Letter

Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this new edition of the Colegio Colombo Británico Model United Nations, and to the Economic and Social Council. We are María José Morales and Sebastián Figueredo, and we will be your chair for this model. We have both participated in several models, which have taught us many things, and we hope that we can pass on as much knowledge and experience as possible to you. We want you to know that nerves are something very normal, we all feel it, but we also know that those nerves only make us doubt ourselves, so we want you to leave those nerves behind and to know that making a mistake is not a failure, but helps you to grow.

For this model, we chose 3 issues that are affecting the world at the moment and that we know will create a very interesting debate. We hope that, with these issues, we can come up with some solutions to eradicate these problems, and that we start to become aware of issues that are affecting the world.

We are also aware that, as this is a Middle School Committee, some of you will be rookies, which means that this will be your first time participating in a UN model. We want you to put that worry aside and know that, even if you don't have the same experience or level as other delegates, you are still capable of going out there and giving your all! We will still be looking out for all of you and helping you, regardless of whether you have experience or not. Even so, we want you to do the necessary research to maximise your capabilities, as only with a thorough understanding of the topics will you be able to perform to your best level.

We want this 22nd edition to be the beginning of a new experience that will open many doors for you and which will leave you with a lot of knowledge. We would also like to remind you that we are here for you, if you have any questions or doubts you can write to us by mail or look for us and we will try to answer them either before or during the model.

Kind regards,

María José and Sebastián

ECOSOC Chair

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## 2. **Simulation Topic:** *The economic and social impacts of low fertility rates in East Asia*

*Written by Stefanía Jaramillo and Gabriela Tascón for CCBMUN XXI*

### I. **History/Context**

Fifty years ago, women in East Asia were having on average over five children each; this led to a widespread population in the whole region. In the past few years, however, birth rates have started to fall because of multiple changes in society, which led to women choosing to have fewer children.

Countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have some of the lowest birth rates in the world, and soon it is expected that there will be more deaths than births, causing their populations to decrease. This trend causes these countries to have expanding elderly populations, whilst having fewer young adults working in the workforce to make the nations' economies grow.



(The Conversation, 2023)

## Why is the birth rate in this region so low?

Gains in education (especially for women), employment and living standards, a better healthcare system and more efficient family planning has made birth rates drastically decrease in East Asia. Expanded education opportunities in these countries mean that children do not join the workforce so early, and rather attend school or college for a longer period of time compared to fifty years ago. This means that children will still be dependent on their parents while they finish their education, leading big families to be an economic burden rather than a privilege.

Girls are allowed to stay in school longer, and after they finish their education they join the workforce. These activities do not mix with marriage and household duties, so this is why women in East Asia (but also around the world) have started to postpone marriage and childbearing since they do not want any interference with their education/career.

**Table 3. College completion, labor-force participation, and marriage among women ages 25–29 in Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan in 1970 and 2004 or 2005 (percent)**

	Completed four years of college		Employed		Married	
	1970	2005	1970	2004	1970	2005
Japan	10 <sup>a</sup>	49 <sup>ab</sup>	46	74	80	38
Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	31	86	77	54
South Korea	4	62	32	64	88	40
Taiwan	4 <sup>c</sup>	30	39 <sup>d</sup>	76	83	36

(AsiaPacific, 2017)

This is also the case of the women who are already married but do not want to interrupt their work to give birth and take care of a baby, since it is very hard for women who had to drop out of their jobs to return to the work position they were in before they had children. Many women aspire to professional/administrative jobs, but these require long work hours, and work outside of the company, leading to almost no time for activities outside the workplace. Having a baby does not mean only giving birth to the child, but also raising him/her while generally also taking care of household duties, which is what unemployed women are expected to do.



Mainly for these reasons, the region's birth rate has dropped drastically compared to fifty years ago. The necessary birth rate to keep a nation's population stable is 2.1 children per woman. This is also referred to as 'replacement rate', since this is the minimum rate that is needed to ensure that there are enough babies born in a country to populate its future generations. Most East Asian countries do not reach this minimum, and the whole region stands at a worrying 1.2 children per woman, when the global average fertility rate is 2.3 children per woman.

Some East Asian countries, such as South Korea, have a TFR (total fertility rate) of 0.78 children per woman. This is very concerning considering the minimum 2.1 children required to maintain natural population growth. If rates continue like they are presently, statistics portray that the nation's population will start to decrease from 2025 to 2030. Similarly, countries such as Japan and Taiwan, whose TFRs are 1.3 and 1.23 respectively (Westley, Choe, Retherford, 2017), are also expecting a population decrease in about seven to ten years.

### **Effects of population control methods**

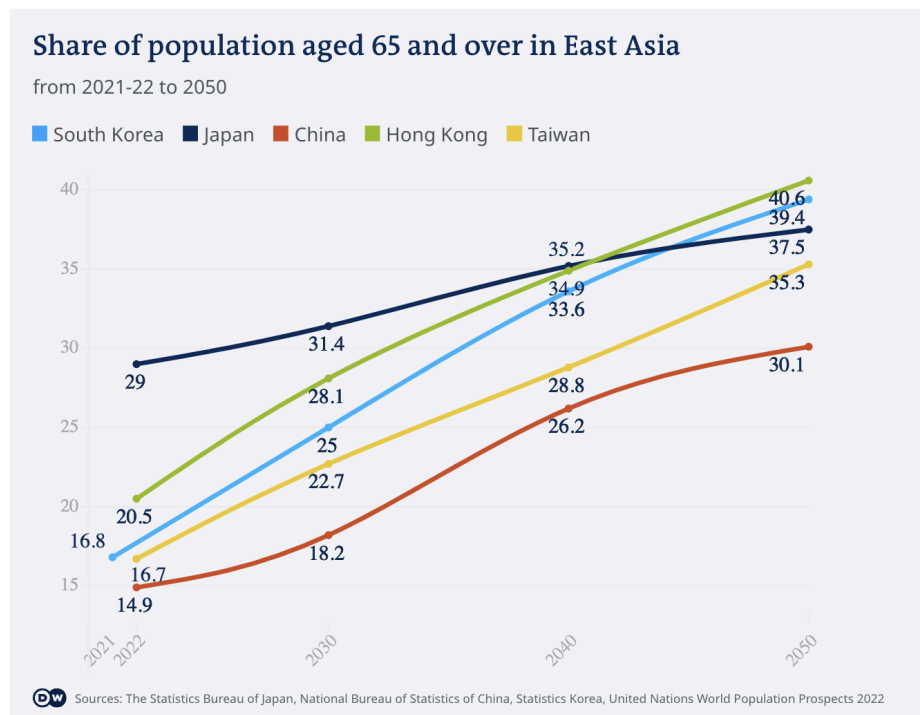
Most countries on the Asian continent had to deal with problems related to rapid population growth many years ago; this led many of them taking measures to reduce their birth rates. One of the most famous measures was China's One Child policy, which ranged from 1979 to 2016. This policy allowed couples to have only one child (with some exceptions), and although it did slow down population growth, the effects of this policy are starting to become evident just now.

Since couples were only allowed to have one child, couples preferred boys, since they could inherit the family's name and properties, and would be able to work and look after their parents when they grew up. This led to a rise in abortions of female fetuses, an increase in the number of girls placed in orphanages, and even the infanticide of many baby girls. This problem widened the gap between males and females in the countries, leading to a generation of unmarried men with fewer females available for marriage, which consequently led to less babies being born.

Soon the Chinese government allowed couples to have two and then three children, and although China still has one of the biggest populations worldwide, it will also start to see the effects of low fertility rates in the future.

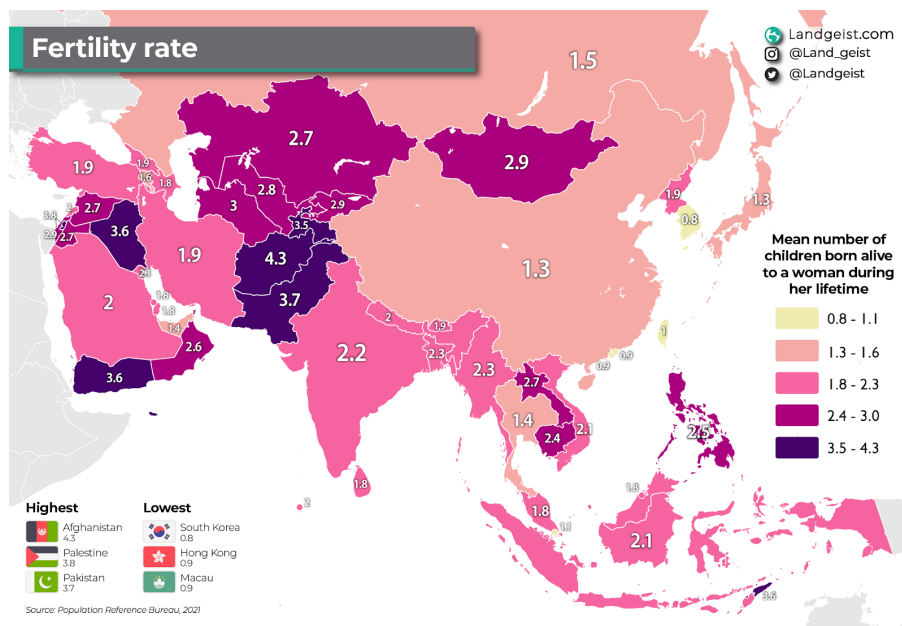
## II. Current Situation

The decline of the birth rate in the area has led to an increase of the elderly population, with countries like Japan having almost a third of its population aged 65 or older. It is also expected, according to the United Nations Population Prospects, that by 2050 one in three people will be over the age of 65 in East Asia. This is made clear in the description about the “4-2-1” family structure in China, given by Sabrina Luk, an assistant professor of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore; the family structure describes four grandparents, two parents and one child.



(DW, 2022)

Low fertility in the short term increases the country's GDP per capita, as households can focus on work, and both the household and the nation have reduced costs from having fewer children, so that people can buy more goods. But in the long term, as the generation of children that were affected by the low fertility rates enter the workforce, the country begins to face specific problems such as the decrease in the total population, the bigger demographic of the population being aged 65 or older, and less labour which leads to fewer taxes being paid to the government.



(Landgeist, 2022)

## Foreign labour

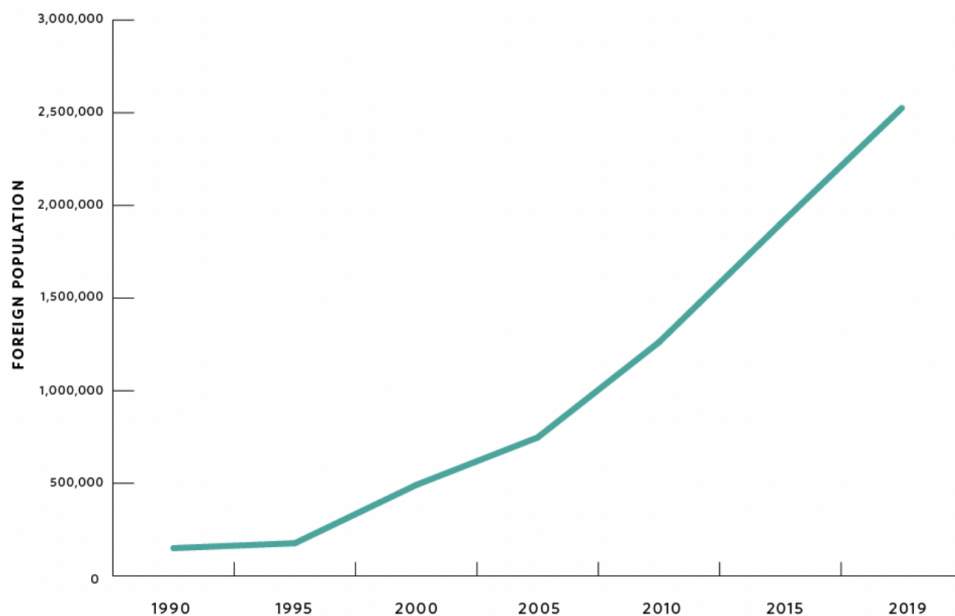
Migration to countries under the rate of 2.1 children per woman could be a partial solution to the problem. It can help the nations maintain their natural population growth, because even if the immigrants were not born in the country, they can still enter the workforce, marry and have kids, just like a citizen who was born in the nation. Still, the idea has not been fully embraced by some East Asian countries; in Japan only 1.5% of the registered population are foreigners, and in China the situation is worse, as more people are moving out of the country rather than entering. In 2020, both Hong Kong and Macao combined had 0.1% of the



total workforce made up of foreigners. This, compared to other industrialised countries, is a much lower percentage; for example, in Germany the ratio is about 15.8%.

On the other hand, South Korea has a more beneficial policy for foreigners, as it is the first Asian country to give permanent foreign residents local voting rights, and the government has invested heavily in programmes for social integration. However, the country only offers three visas that allow for permanent settlement: the Overseas Korean Visa for co-ethnic immigrants; the visa for high-skilled professionals and investors; and lastly, the marriage migrant visas. Despite these policies friendly to immigrants, the nation faces another problem. A lot of foreign women in South Korea experience a high risk of violence from their husbands, as a survey found that 43% of them experienced domestic violence in multicultural families. In the case that the woman decides to get a divorce, her children could risk being undocumented.

FIGURE 2  
**Foreign Population in South Korea**



(Endowment for International Peace, 2021)

## What is being done?

Every East Asian country that has been affected by low fertility rates is creating its own solution and strategies to solve the problem, and even if they have not been the most effective, it is still important to see every strategy for each individual country.

**China:** To encourage their young population to give birth to more children, since 2021, local governments have been giving incentives like tax deduction, housing subsidies and longer maternity leave. Also, Beijing has banned private-tutoring companies from making a profit out of teaching at the weekends or during holidays, as the industry was charging excessive prices, which meant that parents could not afford to have more children. Competition for good jobs is very fierce in China, so parents tend to spend a lot of money on extracurricular classes to ensure their children have the best opportunity in life.

Additionally, China's National Health Commission has urged provincial and central governments to spend more on improving child care services and reproductive health nationwide. China's State Council encourages companies to give the option to work from home and to have more flexible working hours for their employees who are parents. It also told local authorities that they must offer preferential housing to the families that have multiple children, and some cities are even offering monthly subsidies and allowances to mothers until their child is three years old. Despite all these incentives, these solutions are not as effective as they might appear, since young people believe that first they must worry about low salaries, high rent and heavy financial pressure.

**South Korea:** The government has launched programmes to encourage their people to have more children and has spent more than \$200 billion USD on it. Some initiatives are: the offering of monetary "baby vouchers" for new parents; extending paid paternity leave; help on medical and fertility treatment expenses; and campaigns to encourage men to make more of a contribution to housework and childcare. The government created a package of measures to address the problem such as more affordable housing, shortening career breaks for women

after having a child, and providing more job opportunities for young people. Unfortunately, these strategies seem to be failing as they do not properly address sky-high living costs or the change in social attitudes toward work-life and gender roles.

**Japan:** The government spends about \$3.5 trillion yen annually to stop the falling birthrate trend that is being seen in the country. These solutions are mostly in the form of an allowance; \$15000 yen are provided for newborn children until they are two years old, and for the children that are three and older to the age of senior high school, the allowance would be of \$10000 yen. Some rural places that tend to be the most affected by the issue are even offering cars and rent-free homes, and the government is also opening nursery schools and day-care centres. However, the solution doesn't address the high cost of living and the expenses for parents if they wish to send their children to a good high school or university.

### III. Key points of the debate

- Link between high costs of living with a nation's birth rate
- The ineffective solutions already made by nations with low birth rates
- How gender norms are affecting a woman's want to have children
- The increase in elderly population
- The decrease of adults participating in the workforce in East Asian nations
- Immigration as a temporary solution to keep a stable workforce

### IV. Guiding questions

1. Is the birth rate of your country at, above or below the stable population level (when the population is neither increasing or decreasing)?

2. What is the percentage of the population over 65 years of age, and what effects does this have on your country's economy?
3. What are some effects that your country is facing due to its birth rate? What is your country doing to help maintain its birth rate at a healthy level?
4. Does your country have special policies to support parents in the workplace?
5. What solutions does your country propose to solve the problem of declining birth rates in some countries (more immigration, monetary incentives for larger families, etc)?

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