

Births Fall Below 700,000 Far Earlier Than Expected: Is There a Way Out?

今回は日本の出生数の急減に関する話題です。2024年、日本の出生数は政府の予想よりも14年も早く70万人を下回りました。背景には、経済的な不安や結婚・出産に対する考え方の変化など、さまざまな要因があるとされています。今後も社会全体で取り組むべき課題が多く残されていますが、状況を改善するためにどのような工夫や支援ができるのでしょうか？あなたならどんなアイデアを提案しますか？講師と意見を出し合ってみましょう。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

The number of children born in Japan in 2024 fell below 700,000 for the first time. This is 14 years earlier than the government had **projected**. The sharp decline underscores the rapid pace of the country's falling number of births.

A major factor behind the trend is the growing reluctance among young people to marry or have children, largely attributed to economic insecurity. In response, experts are calling for urgent measures to improve the financial situation of younger generations.

In 2023, the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research estimated that 755,000 children would be born to Japanese citizens in 2024. It had projected that the number of births would drop below 700,000 in 2038, with a forecast of 692,000 that year.

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1. Article

Japan's social security system operates mainly on a pay-as-you-go model, **funded** by insurance premiums from the working-age population. If the number of births continues to decline at the current rate, the **burden** on workers will increase, putting the system's financial **stability** at risk.

Time is also running out to reverse the trend. The number of people born in the 1990s, who are now of marriageable age, had been steady at around 1.2 million per year. However, that figure dropped below 1.1 million in 2005 and fell to under 1 million by 2016. Future birth cohorts are expected to shrink even further.

The government has warned that the years leading up to 2030 may be the "last chance" to reverse the trend. However, effective countermeasures have yet to be implemented.

Japan's total fertility rate, the average number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime, also fell to a record low of 1.15. Economic uncertainty is a major reason why more young people are choosing not to marry or have children.

Takumi Fujinami, a senior researcher at the Japan Research Institute, said, "Lower-income individuals are less likely to have children. It's **urgent** that we improve the economic conditions of young people preparing for marriage or parenthood, for example, by raising the minimum wage."

Fujinami also noted that the decline in births is affecting not only urban areas but regional areas as well. While dual-income households are now the norm, many of these regions still lack quality job opportunities for women. He emphasized the need to "rethink how female employment is structured in regional areas too."

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2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. **project** (数字・傾向などを) 予測する

Weather researchers cannot correctly **project** the weather more than about five days ahead.

2. **fund** (～を) 資金提供する、資金を出す

I **funded** my college education through part-time jobs, a grant, and a loan.

3. **burden** (～の) 負担、重荷

Taxing all imports puts a large financial **burden** on the average citizen.

4. **stability** 安定、安定性

Many people want a regular full-time job for financial **stability**.

5. **urgent** 緊急の、差し迫った

The city has an **urgent** need for more low-cost housing.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. Why are people concerned about the rapid decrease in the birth rate?
2. According to the article, what are the causes of the low birth rate?
3. What does researcher Takumi Fujinami think the solutions are?
4. How do you think the working conditions for women could be improved?
5. What other actions can be taken to improve the situation?

4.

出生数70万人割れ、国の推計より14年早く 社会保障制度に暗雲、背景に若者の経済不安

令和6年に生まれた子供の数（出生数）が国の推計よりも14年も早く70万人を割り込み、急速な少子化の進行が改めて浮き彫りとなった。背景には経済的な不安で結婚や出産に踏み切れない若者が増加している現実があり、専門家は若者の経済状況改善を訴える。

国立社会保障・人口問題研究所（社人研）が令和5年にまとめた将来推計人口（中位推計）は、6年の日本人のみの出生数を75万5千人と見込んでいた。初めて70万人を割り込むのは、2038（令和20）年の69万2千人になるとの想定だった。

日本の社会保障制度の多くは現役世代が支払う社会保険料で賄う「賦課方式」を採用している。このまま急速に少子化が進行すれば、現役世代の負担増加に留まらず、社会保障財源が逼迫（ひっばく）し、制度自体の持続性も揺らぎかねない。

加えて、少子化傾向の反転への時間的猶予もない。現在、結婚適齢期を迎えている1990年代生まれの出生数は120万人程度で安定していたが、2005（平成17）年に110万人を割り込み、2016（平成28）年には100万人を下回るなど、今後適齢期を迎える世代の減少が予想される。

政府は「2030（令和12）年までがラストチャンス」と危機感を強めるが、反転攻勢に向けて有効な手は打てていない。

女性1人が生涯に産む子供の推定人数「合計特殊出生率」も、1・15と過去最低を更新した。背景には経済的不安で結婚や出産を諦める若者の増加がある。日本総合研究所の藤波匠上席主任研究員は「低所得層ほど子供を持たない。最低賃金を引き上げるなど、これから結婚、出産を迎える若者の経済状況を改善することが急務だ」と訴える。

藤波氏は都市部だけでなく、地方でも出生率が低下しているとも指摘する。夫婦がともに働いて家計を支える形が一般的な家族の在り方となっているが、地方に優良な女性雇用が少ないことが影響している。藤波氏は「地方でも女性の雇用の在り方を見直していくことが求められる」と述べた。

出典：出生数70万人割れ、国の推計より14年早く 社会保障制度に暗雲、背景に若者の経済不安
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