

Birth Dearth

Worried about the population explosion? You're way behind the times. Thanks largely to urbanization, rising education for women and (in China) the none-too-gentle hand of government, the mass of humans on the planet is likely to stabilize in the third quarter of this century – and then begin to fall. One consequence is rapidly aging national populations led by Europe and the affluent Asian countries, where fertility has long been below the rate (roughly 2.1 births per female per lifetime in developed countries) needed to stabilize the numbers.

Want something real to worry about? How about: Who's going to pay to support the bulge of retirees now working its way through the proverbial demographic snake?

POPULATION BUSTS

SELECTED COUNTRIES	RATIO OF ELDERLY POPULATION TO LABOR FORCE (EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE)		FERTILITY RATE 2009 (EST.)
	2000	2050 (PROJECTED)	
Italy	42.7%	98.5%	1.31
Japan	32.2	94.9	1.21
South Korea	15.3	91.4	1.21
Poland	28.1	83.1	1.28
Germany	34.5	73.9	1.41
France	36.2	65.0	1.98
Britain	30.8	58.1	1.66
Russia	25.4	52.9	1.41
United States	23.5	50.3	2.05
China	11.7	48.0	1.79
India	12.6	32.6	2.72
Mexico	13.5	43.5	2.34
Brazil	11.3	39.2	2.21

SOURCES: OECD Factbook 2009; CIA World Factbook

