



By: TA | AP Brief

# Births in China drop to lowest rate since 1949 communist revolution



How do you persuade a population to have more babies after generations of limiting families to just one?

A decade after ending China's longtime one-child policy, authorities are pushing a range of ideas and policies to try and encourage more births — tactics that range from cash subsidies to taxing condoms to eliminating a tax on matchmakers and day care centers.

The efforts haven't paid off yet. At least, that's what population figures released Monday show for what is now the world's second-most populous nation.

China's population of 1.4 billion continued to shrink, marking the fourth straight year of decrease, new government statistics show.

The total population in 2025 stood at 1.404 billion, which was 3 million less than the previous year.

Measured another way, the birth rate in 2025 is the lowest on record since 1949, the year that Mao Zedong's Communists overthrew the Nationalists and began running China.

Figures before that, under the previous Nationalist government, were not available. The rate of 5.63% is the number of births per 1,000 people.

China was long the world's most populous nation until 2023, when it was surpassed by regional neighbor and sometime rival India.

Monday's statistics illustrate the stark demographic pressures faced by the country as it tries to pivot from a problem it is working hard to overcome: status as a nation with a growing but transitional economy that, as is often said, is "getting old before it gets rich."

## Is a snake involved?

The number of new babies born was just 7.92 million in 2025, a decline of 1.62 million, or 17%. The latest birth numbers show that the slight tick upwards in 2024 was not a lasting trend.

**Births declined** for seven years in a row through 2023.

Most families cite the costs and **pressure of raising a child** in a highly competitive society as significant hurdles that now loom larger in the face of an economic downturn that has impacted households struggling to meet their **living costs**.

Another potential factor in the numbers: last year in China was the year of the snake, considered one of the least favored years for having a child under the Chinese zodiac.

Like many other **countries in Asia**, China has faced a declining fertility rate, or the average number of babies a woman is expected to have in her lifetime.

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While the government does not regularly publish a fertility rate, last saying it was 1.3 in 2020, experts have estimated it is now around 1.

Both figures are far below the 2.1 rate that would maintain the size of China's population.

For decades, the Chinese government barred people from having more than one baby and often sanctioned those who did — a policy that produced more than two generations of only children.

In 2015, the government raised the permitted amount of offspring to two and then, facing demographic pressure, further revised the limit to three kids in 2021.

## Economics are behind the decision

The push for more births is about the economy. China now has 323 million people

over 60, or 23% of the entire population.

That number has continued to rise, while the working-age population is shrinking, meaning there are fewer workers to support the older population.

This demographic shift is happening while China is in the process of trying to transition away from labor-intensive industries like farming and manufacturing into a consumer-driven economy built with high-tech manufacturing.

The difficulty is in trying to get richer as a country, while this population shift likely means a slowing economy.

### Officials have had limited success with policy changes to incentivize families to have more children

Officials have had limited success with policy changes to incentivize families to have more children. In July, the government announced cash subsidies of 3,600 yuan (\$500) per child to families.

Coupling incentives with other attempts to mold behavior, the government also has started taxing condoms.

China removed contraceptives, including condoms, from a value-added tax exemption list in 2025, meaning condoms are now being hit with a 13% tax that kicked into effect Jan. 1.

To further promote child-rearing, kindergartens and daycares have been added to the tax-exemption list along with matchmaking services.