



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on December 28, 2024

Population Collapse: Is (Western) Human Extinction Near?

Dating back to the Middle Ages, the town of Semestene in Sardinia, Italy, has quite a history — one that could come to an end within a decade. With a population that has dwindled rapidly in recent years, 54 of its 126 residents are [aged 65 or over](#). The town has just *four* children under 10 years old remaining. And its last birth, a 2023 [report held](#), was eight years earlier.

Welcome to Ghost Town Italy.

Sound like exaggeration? Well, consider that the U.S. has [approximately](#) 3,800 ghost towns, with New Mexico [having about](#) 400 alone. Italy is about the size of that state.

And it has at least *6,000* ghost towns.

“At least,” that is, because [that estimate](#) was made in 2015 — and informed that another 15,000 localities were “on the brink.”

One could in fact wonder if this is the emptiest a European nation’s towns have been since the medieval black plague wiped out one-quarter to one-half of the continent’s population. The problem now is another plague, too.

The plague of low fertility.

Why worry about this? I mean, with pasta and pizza and the like having spread throughout the world, we needn’t worry about losing our favorite *buonissima*(!) Italian fare. What’s more, there are in excess of eight billion people on the planet. So shouldn’t we cheer this *bambini* bust? Perhaps not.

Not Just Italy Getting the Demographic Boot

First, it’s ironic that a birthplace of Western civilization now leads in its decline because of a lack of births. But that is reality: Italy is merely representative of Western European countries in general. And front and center warning about this has been billionaire visionary Elon Musk. Just consider comments he made — and those of a popular X user — not long ago (tweet with video below).

That user, a German entrepreneur named Ole Lehmann, also posted some other striking information (below). For one thing, he points out that by “2100, Europe will have lost 117 million [more] people.”

In fact, note (below) how much the number of births has declined in Europe in just one year (2022-23.) The only European nation on the list that registered an increase is Norway.

Of course, this wouldn’t be too consequential if the decline occurred within the context of still robust birth rates. In reality, however, many of the world’s fertility rates — and Western peoples’ in particular



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— have long been strikingly low. (Map-style statistics follow. Note: 2.1 children per woman is replacement level.)

And below are countries and their fertility rates presented as a list. As you'll see, European/European-origin nations generally have the lowest rates.

“Poof!” Goes the West?

This may not matter much to the hate-the-West-first crowd — or those believing that, somehow, Western ideals will be perpetuated by non-Western peoples. But those who know what a world without the West really means for humanity will be alarmed. (Recommended reading: [my 2023 essay “A World Without the West.”](#)) Also troubled may be those who understand that, as commentator Mark Steyn put it, “The future belongs to those who show up for it.”

Westerners are showing up less than most other peoples, too. And what this means exactly was explained by Marko Jukic, a senior analyst at Bismarck Analysis. “A fertility rate below 1.6 means 50% less new people after three generations, say 100 years. Below 1.2 means an 80% drop,” *Newsweek* [quoted him as stating](#) in October. “The U.S. is at 1.64. China, Japan, Poland, Spain all below 1.2. South Korea is at 0.7—96% drop. Mass extinction numbers.”

Oh, Italy is at 1.2 as well.

What Happens in the West Doesn't Stay in the West

All this said, declining fertility is a worldwide phenomenon. As HealthData.org [wrote](#) in March, quoting *The Lancet*:

By 2050, over three-quarters (155 of 204) of countries will not have high enough fertility rates to sustain population size over time; this will increase to 97% of countries (198 of 204) by 2100.

While the zero-population-growth types and misanthropes will applaud, this, again, comes with some negative consequences. As Earth.com [explained](#) last Wednesday:

When fewer babies are born, the workforce thins out in a matter of decades.

Economic systems depend on a steady stream of workers, consumers, and taxpayers. If countries produce fewer citizens, they may struggle to maintain productivity and keep growth on track.

Economists worry that, as population structures skew towards older groups, tax bases might shrink, and this could make it harder to pay for services that keep society running smoothly.

As an example, consider again good ol' (and old) Italy. As Maria Rita Testa, a professor of demography at Luiss University in Rome, [told](#) CNN last year:

“In our pension system, which is a pay-as-you-go system, where the current workers pay for the pension benefits of the current retired people, this will create a big challenge and burden.”



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Put differently, a highly fecund civilization is like a pyramid. There's a wide pool of young people at the bottom and a much smaller group of elderly near the tip. With baby-bust demographic collapse, however, this pyramid flips upside-down. A relatively small group of young people at that ground-level "tip" then support a larger group of elderly up top.

Remedies?

The one factor that *may* change this equation at least somewhat, if not profoundly, is the increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence and robotics. As this technology replaces workers, it *may* end up supporting the elderly (and others). But this is, of course, uncharted economic and social territory.

Moreover, we perhaps shouldn't bet that our future AI automatons will preserve Western culture. Given this, it's wise to consider the findings and prescriptions of what's perhaps the best documentary on the baby-bust subject: 2008's *Demographic Winter* (below).

What, though, if we can't resurrect the be-fruitful-and-multiply spirit? Well, then know that population collapse does have at least one bright side. Remember Sardinia, that increasingly child-free Italian isle? Starving for residents, a local government there will [sell you a villa](#) for just a bit more than *one dollar*.

So take the trip and "*Buon appetito!*" Just be sure, *amico*, that you don't mind eating alone.



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