

South Korea birth rate plunges to record low



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The country has spent billions trying to encourage people to have more children

The growth of South Korea's population this year will be the slowest rate ever recorded, despite efforts to boost it, officials say.

About 360,000 babies will be born, leading to concern over the effect of an ageing population on the economy.

Officials blame rising youth unemployment.

But couples say the rising cost of living, including housing and soaring education prices, means that having a large family is not an option.

Women have additional concerns over weak maternity-leave policies and a stubborn resistance by men to help with the housework, BBC World Service Asia-Pacific editor Celia Hatton says.

It is the first time the number of births in a year has fallen below 400,000.

South Korea has spent about \$70bn (£53bn) trying to boost the country's birth rate over the past decade, handing out baby bonuses, improving paternity leave and paying for infertility treatment.

Officials fear that a low birth rate could reduce the number of people in the workforce and drive up welfare costs for the increasing elderly population, undermining the

potential for economic growth.

South Korea's death rate in 2016 was estimated to be 5.8 people per 1,000 of the population, or about 295,000.

South Korea's new drive to boost flagging birth rate



By News from Elsewhere...
...as found by BBC Monitoring
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Government efforts to encourage a baby boom have so far failed

South Korea's government has announced a host of measures to encourage people to make more babies, as concerns grow over the country's stubbornly low birth rate.

Couples seeking fertility treatment will get state financial support regardless of their income level from September, **the Korea Herald reports**. The help is currently limited to lower-income couples, but the change means everyone will now be eligible for at least 1m won (\$900; £680) per session, with the lowest earners receiving 2.4m won.

South Korea's birth rate has **plummeted since the 1960s**, with little change in recent years despite **billions of dollars** in government spending. Health Minister

Chung Chin-youb says "all possible efforts" must be made to reverse the decline. Other measures announced include a guarantee of three days unpaid leave for those receiving fertility treatment, effective from July next year, and increased paternity leave payments for fathers welcoming a second child. Households with three or more children will also be given priority admission to public childcare facilities, the paper says.

In the first five months of 2016, births were down by 5.3% compared to the same period last year, the **Korea Times reports**. Critics of the government's approach say the problem isn't money but rather South Korea's corporate culture, where employees are often expected to work long hours and don't feel they can take time off for childcare.