

Read the article below. Be prepared to express and defend your opinion about the following statement:

Couples Should Have Babies Instead of Pets

Birth rates are falling to alarmingly low levels. Japan and South Korea are worrying about their future economic viability. A conference in Italy has addressed Italy's upcoming demographic crisis. Italy has one of the world's lowest birth rates. There will be considerable strains on pensions and the welfare system as the population ages. The head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, has warned that having children is becoming unaffordable for many couples. He said starting a family is a "titanic effort" that only the rich can afford.

The Pope encouraged Italians to have more children. He cautioned couples for making "selfish, egotistical" choices that result in lower birth rates. He said this is threatening Italy's economic future. He said there was a "demographic winter". Italy saw a record low number of births last year (392,000) and an elevated number of deaths (713,000). The Pope urged couples to have babies instead of pets. The BBC has said that Italy is often dubbed "the country of empty cribs." It quoted Elon Musk as tweeting that "Italy is disappearing."