

# France sees collapse in births to lowest since World War Two

By Leigh Thomas

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A woman holds her stomach at the last stages of her pregnancy in Bordeaux April 28, 2010. REUTERS/Regis Duvignau/File Photo [Acquire Licensing Rights](#)  
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- 2023 births lowest since World War Two France has typically had high birth rate, supported by benefits Economic, social concerns weigh on birth rate

PARIS, Jan 16 (Reuters) - France saw the lowest number of births since World War Two last year, the national statistics agency INSEE said, in a blow to its traditionally strong demographic profile.

France registered 678,000 births last year, representing a decrease of 7% from 2022 and down 20% since peaking in 2020, INSEE said in its annual census report.

The country has for decades been an outlier compared to other European countries, avoiding a collapse in birth rates as seen in Germany, Italy and Spain.

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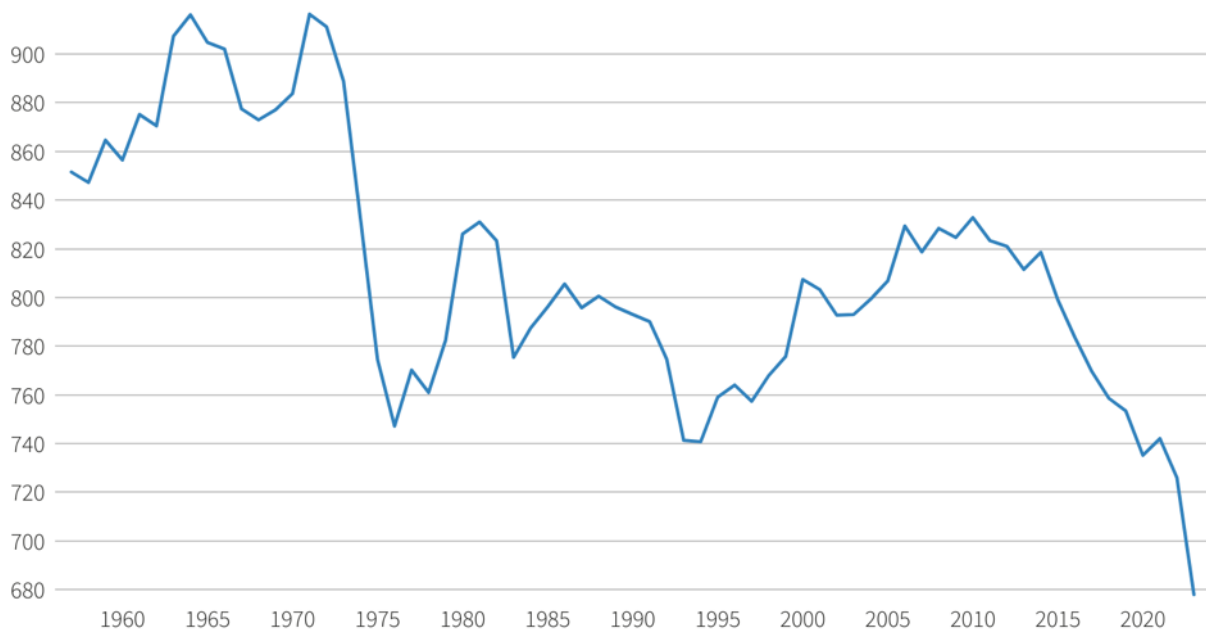
Demographers have traditionally put this down to France's generous health and childcare system as well as tax breaks and other benefits for having children, especially three or more.

That has helped soften the impact of an aging population while contributing to the country's long-term growth prospects, which economists say are generally determined by demographics, productivity gains and labour force participation.

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## French births at post-war low

Thousands of births per year



Source: INSEE

Reuters Graphics

INSEE said that the average number of children per mother fell last year to a three-decade low of 1.68 from 1.79 in 2022. In 2021, France had the highest birth rate in the European Union along with the Czech Republic at 1.83, the last year for which comparative figures are available.

Not only is the 2023 figure below the 2.2 generally considered to be necessary to maintain population levels in developed countries, it is also below the 1.8 births estimate that underpinned a deeply contested 2023 retirement reform.

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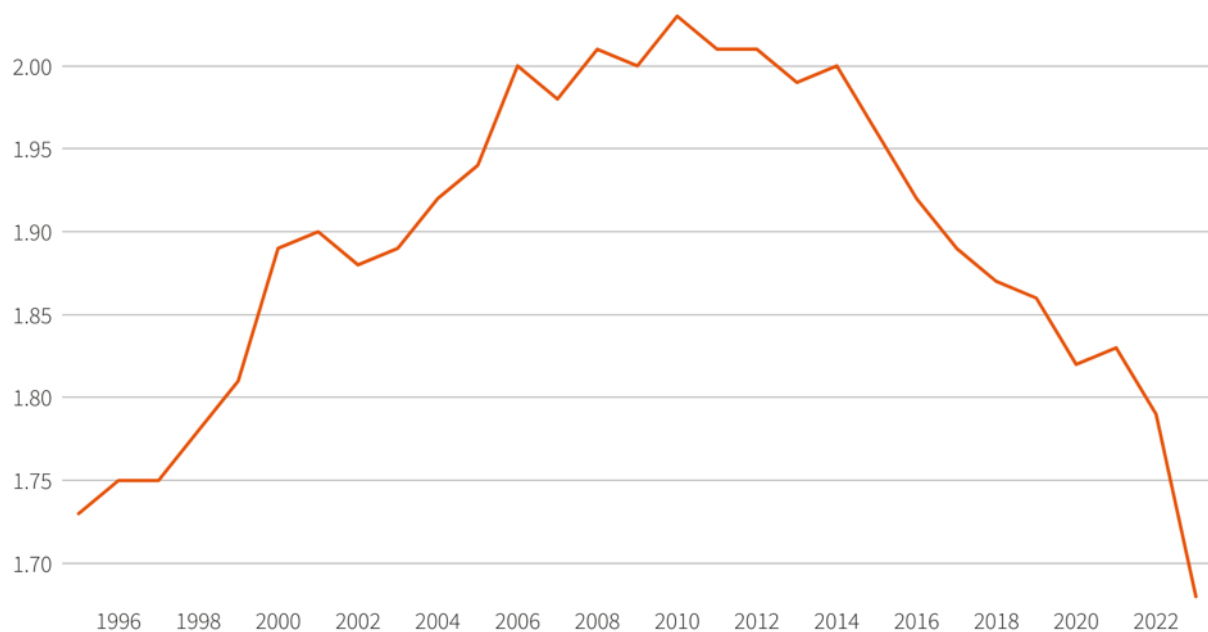
That could mean that if the birth rate stays at 2023 levels the reform will not reduce the pension deficit as planned.

However, a recovery in the birth rate in the coming years is possible as people born in 2000-2010 - a period of high births - themselves

begin to have children, researchers at the Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques said in a note.

## French birth rate in steady decline

Births per female



Source: INSEE

Reuters Graphics

While people are having fewer children, pro-family Unis pour les Familles says that the decline does not mean people want fewer children but rather conditions are not necessarily good.

In an Opinionway poll of 11,000 people for the association, two-thirds who did not have children said that they wanted to while one out of five parents said they would have liked more children.

The most common reasons people gave for not having more children were concerns about the economic, social and climatic outlook, cited by 30% of those polled. Some 28% said raising children cost too much.

The successive crises over the COVID outbreak, surging energy prices and record inflation have taken a heavy toll on household

confidence, which has struggled to recover from record lows reached in mid 2022, according to INSEE's monthly survey.

Reporting by Leigh Thomas Editing by Alexandra Hudson