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CHINA

## Kindergarten and School-Aged Pupil Enrolments Drop Sharply Amid China's Decline in Births

Communist policymaker's two- and three-child incentives came too late to reverse a negative population growth





Chinese children line up under the supervision of a teacher at a kindergarten playground in Beijing, on Dec. 7, 1997. (Goh Chai Hin/AFP via Getty Images)



By [Shawn Lin](#) and [Lynn Xu](#)

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## *News Analysis*

China's kindergartens and elementary schools have seen student numbers decreasing dramatically following the year-by-year shrinking of China's birth rate. The trend is expected to intensify and extend to higher grades in middle schools and colleges in the upcoming years.

On March 23, the Ministry of Education said in a press conference that in 2022, 46,275,500 children enrolled in preschool education in China, 1,776,600 fewer than the 48,052,100 registered in 2021.

Official data shows that the number of children in kindergarten decreased from 2002 to 2013, rallied from 2014 to 2020, and for the first time, declined by 130,600 pupils in 2021, according to a report in Chinese financial media 21jingji.

Students in elementary school numbered 107 million in 2022, trimmed by 1 million from the previous year.



A girl is looking through a fence in Beijing on Sept. 19, 2012. (Wang Zhao/AFP/GettyImages)

The reduced number of kindergarten and elementary school students is due to a dramatic drop in China's birth rate, which the communist rulers' decades-long one-child policy, implemented with forced abortions and sterilizations, is responsible for, independent writer Zhuge Mingyang told The Epoch Times.

“The one-child policy is barbaric to [Chinese families], and now the Chinese demographic dividend has been exhausted, and the nation has been suffering bitter consequences,” he said.

Fearing exacerbating the population decline, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) scrapped the one-child restriction, which started in 1979 and lasted for about 36 years, shifted to a two-child policy in 2015, and then a three-child approach in 2021 in a bid to encourage childbirth.

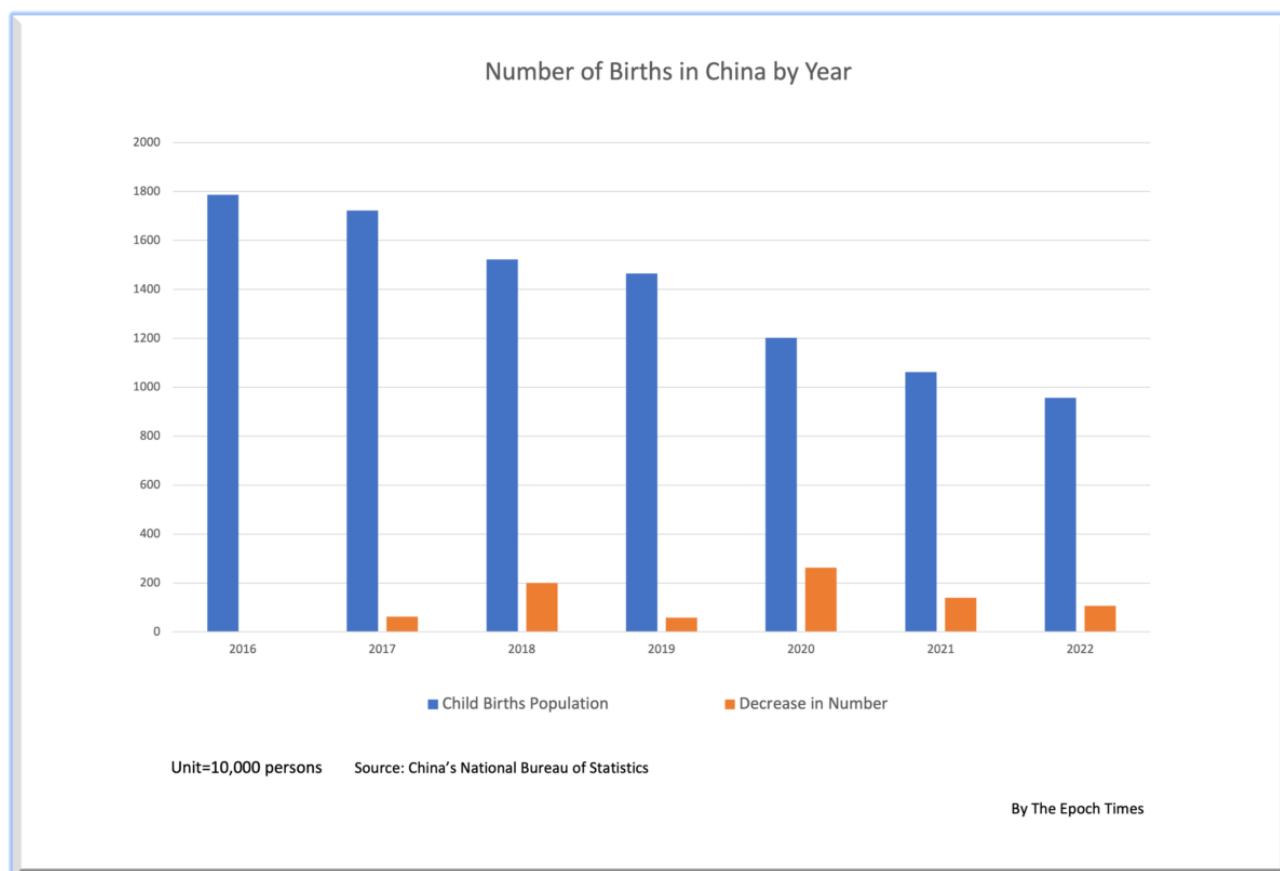
But “it has been useless to come up with any more policies” to revamp the deteriorated population structure, Zhuge said.

## A Population With Fewer Births

A report by Chinese portal site NetEase said the number of China's newborns has remained at around 15 to 17 million since the turn of the 21st century, peaking at 17.86 million in 2016 and then falling annually since 2017.

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Feb. 28, China had only 9.56 million births in 2022, equivalent to 53.5 percent of the 2016 number, a sharp decline of 46.5 percent in six years.

This is the first time China's annual number of births had fallen below 10 million since the CCP took power, even lower than in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the "Great Famine" caused millions of deaths.



Chinese official figures cited here can only be used as a conservative reference because they have long been questioned.

YuWa Population Research, a Chinese public interest institution focused on population and related public policy research, released a forecast report in February that China's birth population is expected to diminish further and is likely to fall below 7 million by 2027.

China "is entering a super-aging society from a deep aging one," the report said.

# Education Industry Is Affected

The Chinese education industry will suffer from the sharp birth rate drop. Since February, topics such as “First wave of kindergarten closures has arrived,” “Kindergartens have a hard time finding a student,” and “Never seen in more than 20 years, the kindergartens in state-owned enterprises enroll students from outside [facilities]” have been frequently seen on Chinese social media.

In 2022, China had 289,200 kindergartens; in 2021, it was 294,800; the number dwindled by about 5,600 kindergartens last year.

A Feb. 23 report by Chinese official media Newsweek described keen competition between kindergartens to grab more students, such as reducing the tuition fee to parents who transfer children from another kindergarten, hiring professional consulting firms to design enrolment plans, and offering hockey, equestrian, art, and other special courses to attract parents.

Private nurseries will be affected by the shortage of students, “once the number of students is reduced, it will immediately affect the income of [private nurseries].” Wang Li (a pseudonym), a nursery school teacher in Shanghai, said to The Epoch Times on March 30, citing that the government only subsidizes state-run nurseries, not private ones.

Wang felt insecure about the future, saying, “Who knows what will happen in the future? Who knows what policies will come out?”

An Epoch Times reporter contacted several kindergartens in the northern city of Shenyang, the central city of Zhengzhou, and southwest Kunming and heard automatic notices that the phone numbers of about 20 private kindergartens were not in use.

## High Education Colleges May Face Scarce Student Source





Chinese security guards check the IDs of students as they enter a school to take tough college entrance exams or Gaokao, in Beijing, on June 7, 2012. (STR/AFP/GettyImages)

Over time, the population decline will undoubtedly extend from kindergarten to elementary, middle, high, and higher levels of education, such as colleges and universities.

In 2021, the number of students enrolled in general education colleges and universities in China was 10.1 million, more than the number of births in 2022.

Chen Zhiwen, editor-in-chief of Eol.cn, a Chinese education portal, raised concerns about the crisis in China's education sector, warning that after 17 years, some colleges and universities would face the dilemma of having no one to recruit, even with admission criteria that exclude testing scores.

*Kane Zhang contributed to this article.*

*Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.*

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