

Declining populations**A**

Although many people in developed countries worry about the effects of declining populations, there are some strong reasons to welcome the trend. For the future of our planet, the benefits of low birth rates in developed countries far outweigh the drawbacks.

B

First of all, the economic challenges of a low birth rate might not be as bad as some people believe. When we think of a declining population, we naturally are concerned about all the money needed to support the elderly. However, fewer young people can also mean less government spending in other areas. For example, government spending on education, transportation, and housing has been increasing for decades in most countries. Now, money previously spent on these services can be spent elsewhere. Furthermore, fewer young people looking for work means more job opportunities, which will result in lower unemployment and potentially lead to a reduction in crime. This means less government spending on police, the courts, and the prison system.

C

Perhaps the biggest economic benefit of a declining population is the drop in house prices, as is already being seen in Japan. This may be bad news for current homeowners, but is certainly good news for the general populace, especially those on lower incomes and young people struggling to get on the housing ladder. Taxes paid by the workforce may well rise in the future in order to support the elderly, but this might be balanced out to an extent by the fact that we won't have to pay so much for housing.

D

Finally, in regard to economic concerns, we need to keep in mind that the disproportionately high number of elderly people to those in the workforce is only a relatively short-term problem. Birth rates in developed countries have generally stabilized over the past decade, and so the ratio of elderly people to those of working age will eventually equalize.

E

The challenges we face in protecting our environment, however, are not temporary. It is generally agreed among scientists that carbon dioxide emissions from human activity are contributing to climate change, and this could have severe consequences for our planet. On average, each child born in a developed country contributes to a higher amount of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere over their

lifetime than a child born in a developing country. In the long run, therefore, a decline in the populations of developed countries is essential for maintaining a healthy environment. If every family were to have one less child, there would be more of a positive effect on reducing carbon dioxide emissions than there would by adopting the energy-saving practices available today. It is possible that the very future of our planet is in peril, and having fewer children is one of the best ways to protect it.

1 Read the text and write the main ideas of the paragraphs.

a paragraph B

b paragraph C

c paragraph D

d paragraph E

2 Read the main text in the Student Book again. What is your opinion on this topic? Should governments of developed countries try to increase birth rates? Or is it better to let the birth rates remain low? Talk to a partner.

3 Match the words or phrases to their antonyms from the text.

a benefits (paragraph A) _____

b young people (paragraph B) _____

c increasing (paragraph B) _____

d income (paragraph B) _____

e rise (paragraph C) _____

f forget (paragraph D) _____

g short term (paragraph E) _____

h safe (paragraph E) _____