**Managing Population Change**

**Different countries face varying problems when attempting to manage population change. *LEDCs* have to manage rapid population growth. *MEDCs* have to manage slow or negative growth and an ageing population.**

**Causes of population growth in LEDCs**

* Limited access to family planning services and education about contraception. Contraception and other methods of family planning may not be culturally or religiously acceptable.
* Children are a valuable source of labour and income for a family. They can work on the land from a young age and as they get older they can earn money in other jobs.
* Children can help to care for younger children and elderly family members.
* High rates of infant mortality (infant deaths) mean that women need to have many children in order to ensure that some survive through to adulthood.
* It may be traditional or culturally important to have a large family.

LEDCs have a high population-growth rate which means that they have many young dependants. Governments in LEDCs and international bodies and charities are working to reduce birth rates and slow down rates of population growth.

# Youthful population

The high birth rate in LEDCs results in a high proportion of the population under 15. This youthful population gives a country specific problems.

The problems include:

* Young children need health care - for example, immunisations. This is expensive for a country to provide.
* Young people need to be educated - providing schools and teachers are expensive. Resources for lessons are difficult to access, and costly to buy.
* In the future, more children will reach child bearing age, putting more pressure on the health service.

# Case study: China

In the late 1970s, the Chinese government introduced a number of measures to reduce the country's birth rate and slow the population growth rate. The most important of the new measures was a **one-child policy**, which decreed that couples in China could only have one child.

* In 1950 the rate of population change in China was 1.9 per cent each year. If this doesn't sound high, consider that a growth rate of only 3 per cent will cause the population of a country to double in less than 24 years!
* Previous Chinese governments had encouraged people to have a lot of children to increase the country's workforce. But by the 1970s the government realised that current rates of population growth would soon become unsustainable.

## The one-child policy

The one-child policy, established in 1979, meant that each couple was allowed just one child. Benefits included increased access to education for all, plus childcare and healthcare offered to families that followed this rule.

### Problems with enforcing the policy:

* Those who had more than one child didn't receive these benefits and were fined.
* The policy was keenly resisted in rural areas, where it was traditional to have large families.
* In urban areas, the policy has been enforced strictly but remote rural areas have been harder to control.
* Many people claim that some women, who became pregnant after they had already had a child, were forced to have an abortion and many women were forcibly sterilised. There appears to be evidence to back up these claims.

## Impact of the policy

* The birth rate in China has fallen since 1979, and the rate of population growth is now 0.7 per cent.
* There have been negative impacts too - due to a traditional preference for boys, large numbers of female babies have ended up homeless or in orphanages, and in some cases killed. In 2000, it was reported that 90 per cent of foetuses aborted in China were female.
* As a result, the gender balance of the Chinese population has become distorted. Today it is thought that men outnumber women by more than 60 million.

## Long-term implications

China's one-child policy has been somewhat relaxed in recent years. Couples can now apply to have a second child if their first child is a girl, or if both parents are themselves only-children.

While China's population is now rising more slowly, it still has a very large total population (1.3 billion in 2008) and China faces new problems, including:

* the falling birth rate - leading to a rise in the relative number of elderly people
* fewer people of working age to support the growing number of elderly dependants - in the future China could have an ageing population

# Population change in MEDCs

Most *MEDCs* are experiencing slow rates of population growth and some are experiencing population decline.

Most MEDCs are in stage 4 of the *demographic transition model* - the population is high, but not growing. Some countries have a declining population and could be said to be entering stage 5. This means that the birth rate in their country has fallen below the death rate. Most MEDCs have a very low rate of *natural increase*.

The average life expectancy in MEDCs is rising. This is due to:

* improvements in **health care** and **medicine**
* increased **leisure** and **recreation time**
* improved knowledge about the importance of a **balanced diet** and **regular exercise**
* improved **living standards** and **quality of life**

Birth rates in MEDCs are falling as people choose to have smaller families later in life. Contraception is easily available and well understood.

## An ageing population

* As people live longer, the structure of a population changes.
* Many MEDCs are now experiencing a significant increase in the number of elderly people as a proportion of the population.
* As birth rates fall and people have smaller families, the number of young dependants is falling and the number of elderly dependants is rising.
* In the near future this will mean that there are fewer economically active people to support the elderly population.
* To try to balance out an *ageing population*, some countries adopt a *pro-natalist* policy - that is, they encourage people to have more children by offering them benefits, such as access to childcare and maternity leave.

# Case study: pro-natalist policy in France

Many areas of Europe have a low *fertility rate* because of the following reasons:

* **education** - people are more aware of the availability of contraception and consequences an unplanned pregnancy can have on their career
* **women in careers** - Women may choose to follow their career choice rather than start a family while young
* **later marriages**
* **state benefits** - couples no longer need children to help care for them when older

France was a country with concerns that professional women were choosing not to have children. The government were worried that the population was not going to replace itself over time.

The policies that were put in place to encourage three-children families were:

* a cash incentive of £675 monthly (nearly the minimum wage) for a mother to stay off work for one year following the birth of her third child
* the 'carte famille nombreuse' (large family card), giving large reductions on train fares
* income tax based on the more children the less tax to pay
* three years paid parental leave, which can be used by mothers or fathers
* government subsidised daycare for children under the age of three, and full time school places for over threes paid for by the government

This has resulted in mothers considering having children and remaining in work. The*fertility rate* in France is one of Europe's highest.

# Coping with an ageing population in the UK

## What are the issues?

* There are decreasing numbers of economically active people in the population and more elderly dependents.

## What can be done about it?

* People are encouraged to save for their retirement in pensions and investments.
* The retirement age is increasing.
* Facilities such as nursing homes and care workers will be needed, perhaps in preference to schools and nurseries, as the population gets older.
* Economically active skilled and unskilled migrants could be encouraged.

# Local population characteristics

The population structure can vary within a country. In England a *census* is conducted every 10 years to find out more about the population characteristics. The results help to show how the population changes over time and in different areas. Councils also collect data.

## Retirement migration

There are areas in England which attract people in retirement age. Dorset, Devon and Cornwall are three areas which attract retirement migrants. There are more elderly there than the national average. The population pyramid for the Torbay area shows this.

## Case study: Bristol

Bristol's population is made up of 13.9 per cent black and minority ethnicity residents. This is similar to the national average of 12.5 per cent. However the different ethnic groups are not spread evenly across the city.

Bristol has a large student population. It also has a higher than average percentage of qualified residents (35.1 per cent in Bristol compared to 29.5 per cent nationally). 20.2 per cent of people travel to work on foot or by bike, whereas the national average is only 12.8 per cent.

The census can therefore tell us a lot about local population characteristics.

Information from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/population/>