

The declining number of children in London

Key information

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Introduction

The London Assembly **Economy, Culture and Skills Committee** is investigating current and projected trends relating to birth rates and the number of children in London and how these trends differ in inner and outer London.

Investigation aims and objectives (Terms of Reference)

- To investigate current and projected trends relating to birth rates and the number of children in London
- To investigate how these trends differ in inner and outer London
- To understand the causes of the declining number of births and young children living in London
- To examine what a declining child population will mean for schools and other public services in London
- To understand the immediate and medium-term economic impact of fewer families and children living in London
- To ask whether the Mayor, local and central government should take action to address the decline in London's child population

Key issues

- The annual number of births in London peaked around 2012 but has since fallen steadily. The number of births in 2023 was 20 per cent lower than the 2012 figure. This has been driven by a drop in fertility rates rather than a decrease in the number of potential mothers. The decline in the fertility rate is greater in Inner London than in the rest of England and Wales, while the decline in Outer London is similar to the national picture.
- The total number of children in London's primary schools has been falling since around 2016. The numbers are continuing to fall in Inner London, while they appear to have stabilised in Outer London. This is a result of domestic migration as well as falling birth rates: among children aged 0-10, there is a large and stable net outflow from Inner London to the rest of the UK. There has recently been an increase in international migration, although the GLA notes that "the effect of international migration on numbers of primary school children is uncertain."
- Over the last decade, most Inner London boroughs saw large decreases in the number of young children. Most Outer London boroughs had stable or increased numbers. The degree of change varies between boroughs, from -25 per cent in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea, to +23 per cent in Havering. There have been various reports of primary schools in Inner London boroughs having to merge or close due to decreasing numbers of children. There have also been reports of nurseries in Outer London boroughs struggling to cope with the demand, as families with children move from Inner to Outer London. London Councils notes that the continued reduction in school places is having an impact on the amount of funding a school receives, resulting in schools having to make difficult decisions about how to balance their budgets.
- The decline in the number of children growing up in London is generally attributed to the high cost of living, and in particular housing costs. According to London Councils, "the drop in birth rate is mainly due to the severe shortage of affordable family housing in the capital, leading to more people deciding not to have families in London". City Intelligence highlights housing costs, childcare costs and the increased cost of basic necessities as factors creating "an unfavourable environment for low-income families with children".
- London's declining birth and fertility rates mean that the decrease in the number of young children living in the capital is expected to continue. A London Councils report from February 2025 predicts a decrease of 3.6 per cent in reception pupil numbers in London over the next four years, which translates to 3,195 places or 117 reception classes. All Inner London boroughs are expected to see a fall, whereas some Outer London boroughs are expected to see an increase.

Key Questions

- What are the reasons behind the reduction in the number of people raising children in London?
- What impact is this demographic change having on public services in London, in particular schools, and what further impact could it have in the future?
- Is this demographic change having any immediate impact on London's economy or cultural make-up, and what impact could it have in the future?
- Are London boroughs adequately prepared for the declining school population, and how should funding be adjusted to protect schools with falling rolls?
- Should the Mayor and other public authorities take action to address this issue, and if so, how?
- What is the Mayor and Government's long-term strategy for managing disparities in school place demand across London?

Call for Evidence

As part of this investigation, the Committee launched a **Call for Evidence**. The Committee welcomed any evidence relevant to any or all of the following questions from organisations and experts on this topic:

1. What are the reasons behind the reduction in the number of people raising children in London?
2. What impact is this demographic change having on public services in London, in particular schools, and what further impact could it have in the future?
3. Is this demographic change having any immediate impact on London's economy, and what impact could it have in the future?
4. Should the Mayor, central and local government take action to address this issue, and if so, how?

[Responses from Londoners about raising children in London.](#)

The Committee also carried out polling on raising children in London. [You can read the analysis here.](#) You can also [view the data tables here.](#)

[Read analysis of responses to FOIs](#) submitted to London Boroughs about school closures.

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