

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*:

- At the 51st OIC Foreign Ministers Meeting, held amid the Israel–Iran conflict, President Erdoğan delivered a series of important messages.
- After a five-month absence, Devlet Bahçeli returned to Parliament with a focus on a Terror-Free Türkiye and the Israeli bellicose posture.
- Türkiye is among the countries grappling with declining fertility rates. We spoke with researcher Rümeysa Hafızoğlu to explore this issue further.

“The Islamic world must become a unified pole of power”: President Erdoğan Calls for Unified Power at OIC Summit

The 51st session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Istanbul this week, became a key venue for expressing collective concern within the Muslim world over escalating regional tensions, particularly the Israel–Iran confrontation.

In his speech, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for greater unity and global agency among Muslim countries, stating: *“The Islamic world, now nearly 2 billion strong, must become a unified pole of power. We are on the brink of a new era—one in which the Muslim world must take on a far greater role.”* His remarks echoed Türkiye’s broader diplomatic positioning in recent years, which emphasises regional cooperation and the necessity of a more equitable global order.

The final declaration adopted by the OIC strongly condemned *Israeli campaign of Genocide in Gaza*. The statement also condemned attacks on Iran, framing them as destabilising and in violation of international law. At Iran’s request, a dedicated session was convened within the summit, highlighting the growing urgency of addressing cross-border escalations and the need for de-escalation mechanisms within the region.

Domestically, the tone of solidarity with the broader Muslim world was also present in political discourse. In a parliamentary



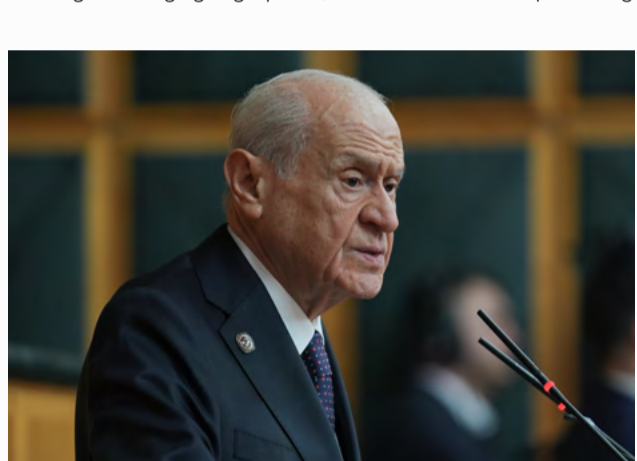
(Arif Hüdaverdi Yaman - Anadolu Agency)

speech, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli criticised what he described as the silence of the Islamic world, underlining the importance of a shared *ummah* consciousness.

Overall, the Istanbul summit and the statements made there reflect Türkiye’s ongoing diplomatic approach, which advocates for regional dialogue, calls for reform in global governance structures, and seeks to amplify the voice of the Global South and Muslim countries on the world stage.

Bahçeli Returns to Parliament, Highlighting Regional Threats and the Importance of a Terror-Free Türkiye

After a five-month absence due to health issues, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, returned to Parliament this week with a spirited speech that reasserted the centrality of the *“Terror-Free Türkiye”* vision to national policy. Addressing regional instability, Bahçeli framed Israel’s recent attacks in the Middle East as a direct threat to Türkiye’s security and strategic goals. *“Israel, by attacking Iran, sought to mask the genocide in Gaza, to sabotage the wheel of a Terror-Free Türkiye, and to instil fear in the region while advancing a Zionist-Imperialist redesign of neighbouring geographies,”* he declared, emphasising



(Ahmet Serdar Eser - Anadolu Agency)

the broader implications of escalating regional conflicts for Türkiye’s internal stability.

In his written statement this week, Bahçeli described Türkiye as a future *“pole star of peace and stability”* within a transforming global order. He warned that Israel’s aggression should not be viewed in isolation, stating: *“One does not need to be a prophet to predict which country may be targeted next after Iraq, Syria, and Iran.”* For Bahçeli, advancing the Terror-Free Türkiye agenda is not only about countering domestic threats, but also about insulating the country from an increasingly volatile neighbourhood shaped by external military interventions and geopolitical manoeuvring.

This week also saw continued movement on the institutional front. Parliamentary Speaker Numan Kurtulmuş held preliminary consultations with political party representatives on the formation of a new commission focused on the Terror-Free Türkiye process. In a related development, senior DEM Party figure Pervin Buldan announced following a visit with Kurtulmuş that their delegation expects to meet in the coming weeks with President Erdoğan, MHP leader Bahçeli, and CHP leader Özgür Özel. She also indicated plans for a renewed visit to İmralı Island. Despite the typically quieter summer season, these developments indicate that dialogue surrounding the Terror-Free Türkiye agenda remains active, with analysts anticipating more concrete steps by the fall.

Understanding Türkiye’s Fertility Decline: A Conversation with Researcher Rümeysa Hafızoğlu

Türkiye has been grappling with a decline in fertility rates for some time. To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, we conducted an interview with Rümeysa Hafızoğlu, a researcher at *Enstitü Sosyal*, which recently carried out a major field study in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Turkish Statistical Institute.

We are witnessing a rapid decline in fertility rates in Türkiye. The latest data shows this rate has dropped to 1.48. What are the socio-economic factors behind this issue? Through what historical process has this rate fallen to 1.51 today?

The recent decline in fertility rates in Türkiye is more critical than expected. In fact, this is not a new issue. Since 1965, Türkiye has been experiencing the consequences of antinatalist policies. During the 1960s, rapid population growth was seen as a hindrance to economic development, and by 1982, the concept of “family planning” had become institutionalised. From the mid-1960s onwards, nuclear families were idealised over extended families, and having fewer children was increasingly valued. Although this trend was reversed after 2007, with pronatalist policies introduced through the 10th, 11th, and 12th Development Plans, the long-standing historical context, global shifts, and local dynamics continued to play a stronger role. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, individual and societal tendencies have accelerated this decline. Therefore, falling fertility is not a recent phenomenon, but the result of a structural and cultural transformation shaped by multiple factors.

To better understand the causes of fertility decline and demographic transformation, we conducted a comprehensive field study under *Enstitü Sosyal*, in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Turkish Statistical Institute. The study was carried out in 12 provinces selected based on the highest, lowest, and most divergent fertility rates. Interviews were conducted with participants from four different fertility backgrounds: grandparents, parents, childless married individuals, and single adults. The research included participants from three generations and utilised both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

The findings reveal that the decline in birth rates cannot be explained solely by mothers’ choices. It is a broad issue that also includes the perspectives of fathers, single youth, and grandparents. Across all generations and regions studied, significant economic, cultural, and social transformations are evident. Perceptions of marriage, parenthood, and childbearing have shifted from older to younger generations. While for older generations, having children was a natural and unquestioned part of life and an investment in the future, for younger cohorts, it has become a complex decision shaped by psychological, social, and economic considerations. Children are no longer seen as essential to marriage, and parenthood is increasingly delayed or reconsidered based on prevailing life conditions.

While the desire to marry and have children still exists, it is now contingent upon a variety of conditions. Younger generations are more focused on *how* and *under what* circumstances they will have children, rather than *when*. Marriage and childbearing decisions are often postponed due to factors such as education, career goals, financial stability, and age. Changing expectations between men and women and the transformation of marriage itself play significant roles in this process.

Moreover, contemporary parenting ideals have become a key determinant of family size. Among middle and younger generations, parenting is approached in a more intense, anxious, and highly planned manner. The desire to raise a well-rounded and capable child has increased the burden on parents, making it more difficult to consider having a second or third child. Parenting is no longer viewed as merely raising a child, but as a responsibility to shape a child’s social, cultural, and economic future. This growing burden often leads to feelings of inadequacy, contributing to a preference for smaller families.

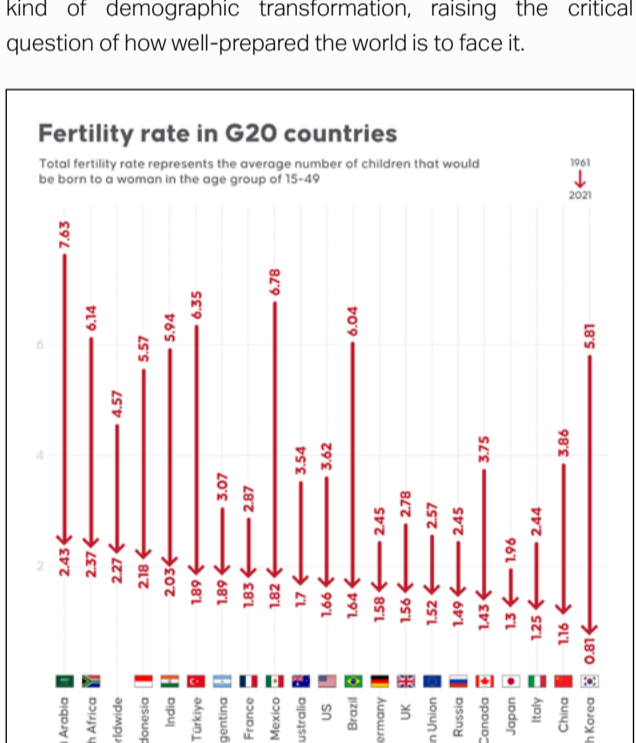
Economic factors are both highly influential and multi-layered. Field data shows that financial concerns stem not only from daily survival but from long-term uncertainty and pressure to invest heavily in children’s futures. Interestingly, families with lower income levels tend to have more children than those with higher incomes. As income rises, so do expectations and investments per child, which tends to reduce overall fertility. Meanwhile, media-driven perceptions of an unsafe world amplify parental anxiety, limiting children’s engagement with their surroundings and turning the responsibility of raising a child into a perceived risk.

Is this issue unique to Türkiye? What kind of demographic trends are we facing on a global scale?

No, quite the opposite. Most countries around the world are now ringing the demographic alarm bells. The global

population is aging rapidly. While the global fertility rate stood at 5 in the 1960s, it has dropped to 2.3 as of 2024, with half of the world’s countries now below the replacement level of 2.1. Niger currently has the highest fertility rate at 6.67, while the 27 EU member states remain below an average of 1.54. Countries like China, South Korea, and Japan are also experiencing sharp declines.

Despite implementing a wide range of policies, these Asian and European nations have struggled to significantly increase fertility rates. Financial incentives alone have proven insufficient. Since fertility is not just an economic issue, many countries are now exploring new models and alternative strategies. If current trends continue, projections suggest that by 2100, 4 out of every 10 people in the world will be African. This indicates that we are heading toward a new and different kind of demographic transformation, raising the critical question of how well-prepared the world is to face it.



What kind of outlook do you foresee for the coming years? Do you have any recommendations for policymakers?

This is a structural and cultural issue that cannot be resolved by married couples or state institutions alone. It requires action from all sectors of society. First and foremost, we must shift the focus from simply lowering fertility to understanding *why population matters*, and raise awareness of the risks posed by population decline across all levels of society.

It is also essential to discuss and promote the value of marriage and parenthood, not only for individuals but for the nation as a whole. There is a lack of practical support systems that ease the lives of families with children. Child-friendly public spaces are limited, and the communal networks (such as extended family and neighbours) that once helped raise children are diminishing. Today, the entire burden of child-rearing falls on parents. Unless these responsibilities are shared and supported, they can become overwhelming. All social actors must not only express support for children in words but actively contribute to making parenting more manageable. The involvement of fathers, grandparents, neighbours, employers, and institutions is becoming increasingly vital.

Directly intervening in fertility decisions is not a sustainable solution. Instead, efforts should focus on addressing the underlying challenges that lead to declining fertility. In addition to national policies, local-level strategies that account for regional differences in fertility dynamics are crucial. These policies should prioritise structural reforms and be tailored to local contexts.

Finally, the idea of having children and more broadly, the structure of family and population change should be embraced by all institutions. A holistic approach is essential. Fertility rates must be discussed alongside rising marriage age, youth employment, parenting anxieties, the impact of individualisation on family life, and the increase in elderly populations. Policymakers must concentrate on the root causes, barriers, and existing opportunities to develop national strategies that are aligned with local realities.

Note:

The findings presented here are part of a broader field research project conducted by *Enstitü Sosyal* on declining fertility and shifting attitudes toward parenthood in Türkiye. A more detailed analysis of the results will be made available in the full research report upon publication.

Highlights

- President Erdoğan attended the NATO summit held in The Hague, Netherlands. During the summit, he met with several world leaders, including U.S. President Donald Trump. The top agenda item was the establishment of global and regional peace and dialogue. Reports indicated that Erdoğan’s meeting with the U.S. President included discussion of the delivery of F-35 fighter jets to Türkiye and the modernisation of F-16s.
- Muharrem İnce, who had left the CHP to establish the Homeland (Memleket) Party, has returned to the ranks of the CHP. İnce was the party’s presidential candidate in 2018 but later parted ways with the main opposition party due to internal disagreements.
- The Turkish Ministry of National Defense (MoD) held a press briefing at the Land Forces Command, where ministry spokesperson Rear Admiral Zeki Aktürk and other officials addressed questions from the press and outlined Türkiye’s defense investment priorities, regional security concerns, and international cooperation efforts. MoD officials highlighted that Türkiye is focusing on investments in a layered air defense system, with plans to expand its ‘Steel Dome’ (Celik Kubbe) across the country.

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