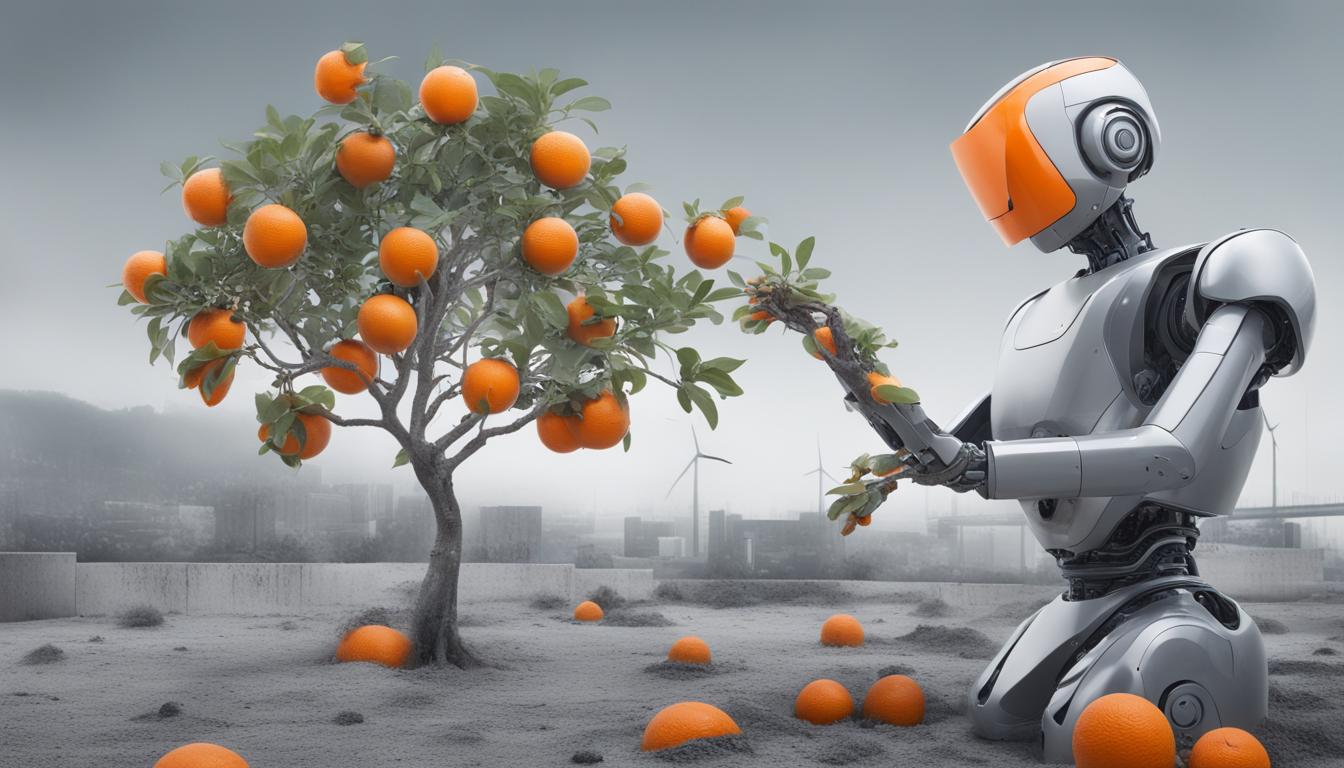
# Pope Francis Urges Italians to Boost Birth Rate Amid Concerns Over Europe's Declining Fertility



In response to Europe's continuously declining birth rates, Pope Francis voiced concerns on May 10, during a pro-family group assembly, urging Italians to increase their birth rate as it poses a future risk to the nation. Italy's birth rate, one of the world's lowest, saw only 379,000 babies born last year. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni supports a campaign to aim for 500,000 births annually by 2033 to counter the economic impacts from an ageing population.

Demographers analyze various causes for dropping European fertility rates—including high housing costs and job instability. Factors such as changing gender roles and a greater emphasis on career also contribute, though the full reasons remain partially unexplained. Currently, Europe's fertility rate averages around 1.5 births per woman, less than the 2.1 required for population stability. In 2022, births plummeted to their lowest since the 1960s, with just 3.88 million births recorded by Eurostat across the continent.

The situation is similar in the UK, where 2022 figures from the Office for National Statistics revealed a fertility rate of 1.49 children per woman, a record low. Dr. Mary-Ann Stephenson highlighted the long-term societal impacts of low birth rates, emphasizing the future needs for healthcare and other services.

Countries like Ukraine, Moldova, Italy, Spain, and Greece are among those with the lowest birth rates in Europe, all experiencing rates significantly below the replacement level. European governments are actively attempting to reverse this trend by investing in pro-child policies, including financial incentives, tax breaks, extended parental leave, and child benefits.