

## Family and work can go together

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Re: Baby Talk, Feb. 3.

Congratulations for raising such an important issue in Leonard Stern's column. Declining or stagnating birth rates are a critical public policy concern for Canada right now, as we face a labour-force crunch.

Mr. Stern correctly points out that women in most industrialized countries are having fewer children. However, his emphasis that well-educated women including women in Canada are choosing career over children isn't the full picture.

If you look at the evidence from studies of OECD countries, women are actually having more children when they are supported by family-friendly policies that help them balance successful careers with fulfilling family lives. In recent weeks France has announced that its total fertility rate (TFR) has gone up to over two children per woman, continuing a steady upward movement and putting it at the top of the fertility charts in Europe, and indeed the industrialized world. Most researchers attribute this increase to the systematic implementation of family-friendly policies and a society that favours and celebrates families. The labour-market participation rate of women in France is also very high, at 81 per cent. Coincidentally, the front-runner for the French presidency, Segolene Royal, has four children herself, serving as a symbolic reminder that family and career can and do go together, with the right supports.

The Europeans are way ahead on this while Canada has yet to act. Sweden and Denmark are other good examples of countries that have generous parental leave provisions, offer high-quality accessible and universal child care and legislate flexible working arrangements for parents. In both countries birth rates are up and women's participation in the workforce is, too.

When asked, most Canadians say they would like to have two or three children, yet they are having fewer. With Canada facing a potential crisis with a shortage of workers, it's time to look closely at the evidence and find the right balance for Canada.

The **Canadian Policy Research Networks** is planning a national roundtable on Sustainable Population Policy later this year. To read more about this issue, visit our website at [cprn.org](http://cprn.org).

Judi Varga Toth and David Hay,

Ottawa

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Illustration:

• Photo: Vincent Kessler, Reuters / French presidential candidate Segolene Royal, centre, with pupils at a boarding school in Martinique last month. Letter-writers Judi Varga Toth and David Hay say Ms. Royal, who has four children, serves as a symbolic reminder that family and career do go together with the right supports.

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