

Baby? I'd rather have a mobile phone.

Italy is going through a population crisis of extraordinary proportions. It 1 _____ be a country 2 _____ babies, 3 _____ there are almost no babies around any more. In truth, more Italians are more interested 4 _____ a mobile phone 5 _____ a son and heir.

When I 6 _____ a well-known maternity hospital in Rome to see some friends with their new-born baby, there were 130 cots in the place, but only two 7 _____. That's nothing unusual. My wife went to a clinic widely 8 _____ to be the best in the city to have our baby. There is room for only 5 babies at a time, but 9 _____ we were there we had place virtually to ourselves.

In an industrial world that 10 _____ a decline in birth rates, Italy has the lowest rates of all – 1.17 children per couple, 11 _____ one study, 12 _____ 1.7 in France and 2.1 in the United States.

13 _____ is extraordinary is that in terms of abstract statistical projection, by the year 2150 Italy 14 _____ millions of new cars, buildings, refrigerators, computers, mobile phones and video recorders – but no people.

(from The Independent on Sunday)

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