

3. GENERAL CONTEXT INDICATORS

Fertility

The total fertility rate indicates the number of children an average woman would have if she were to experience the exact age-specific fertility throughout her life. Allowing for some mortality during infancy and childhood, the population is replaced at a total fertility rate of a little over two.

Over the last decades, fertility declined dramatically across OECD countries, falling on average from 2.7 children per woman of childbearing age in 1970 to 1.7 in 2014 (Figure 3.4). Falls were especially pronounced – by at least four children per woman on average – in Korea, Mexico and Turkey. Before the recent crisis, there was a moderate recovery in average fertility rates between 2000 and 2008. This rebound stalled in many OECD countries in 2009, probably as a consequence of the crisis.

In 2014, fertility was well below the replacement level in most countries, averaging 1.7 across the OECD (Figure 3.4, bars). The highest rate was recorded in Israel at 3.1, where women had almost one child more than women in Mexico and Turkey, the countries with the second and third highest rates, respectively. These three countries were the only OECD countries with a level above the replacement fertility rate (2.1 children per woman). Anglophone and Nordic countries were typically at the higher end. France has the highest fertility rate in Europe (and the 4th highest rate in the OECD) while the lowest fertility rates are found in Japan and South Europe. Fertility rates were notably low in Korea and Portugal, with two parents replacing themselves in the next generation by little more than one child, on average.

Fertility rates are generally higher in key partner economies than in OECD countries; rates are above replacement levels in Argentina, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa. While fertility increased in the Russian Federation by four decimals between 1995 and 2014, fertility decreased in other key partner economies.

Rising female education and employment, a need to secure a job and income, growing housing problems and in some cases insufficient support for families juggling work and children, have all played a role in declining fertility. Family formation postponement is reflected in recent trends in OECD age-specific fertility rates (births per 1000 women) in Figure 3.5. Since 2000 fertility rates have been declining for under 30s whereas at the same time they have been on the rise for over 30s. In the last few years, the average OECD fertility rate of 30-34s exceeded the fertility rate of 25-29s, and so did the rate of 35-39s compared to 20-24s. Also the 40-44 fertility rate is about to surpass the adolescent fertility rate. The adolescent fertility rate has fallen to low levels at under five births per 1 000 adolescents in Denmark, Japan, Korea, Slovenia and Switzerland, but it still remains high at above 50 in Chile and Mexico.

Family formation postponement is also reflected in the increase in the mean age of women at first child birth, in all 26 OECD countries for which data are available

(Figure 3.6). **Between 1995 and 2014, the average mean age at first birth has risen by almost three years, from 26.1 to 28.7 years old.** In 2014 mean ages at first birth were lowest at 27 or under in the United States and in some Eastern European countries (Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Slovak Republic), whereas they were highest at 30 or above in some Asian (Japan, Korea), continental European (Luxembourg, Switzerland) and Mediterranean countries (Italy, Spain).

Definition and measurement

The total fertility rate is the expected number of children born to each woman at the end of the childbearing years (i.e. if the likelihood of her giving birth to children at each age was the current prevailing age specific fertility rates). It is computed by summing up the age-specific fertility rates defined over five year intervals. Assuming there is no net migration and mortality remains unchanged, the total fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman (“replacement”) ensures broad population stability.

The age-specific fertility rates are the number of births per 1000 women of a given age in a given year. They are presented here per five year age group.

Fertility data typically come from civil population registers or other administrative records. These are harmonised according to United Nations and Eurostat recommendations.

Mean ages of women at first birth are from OECD Family Database, based from Eurostat demographic statistics and national statistical institutes.

Further reading

OECD (2016), “SF2.1 Fertility rates”, OECD Family Database, www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm.

OECD (2016), “SF2.3 Age of mothers and age-specific fertility”, OECD Family Database, www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm.

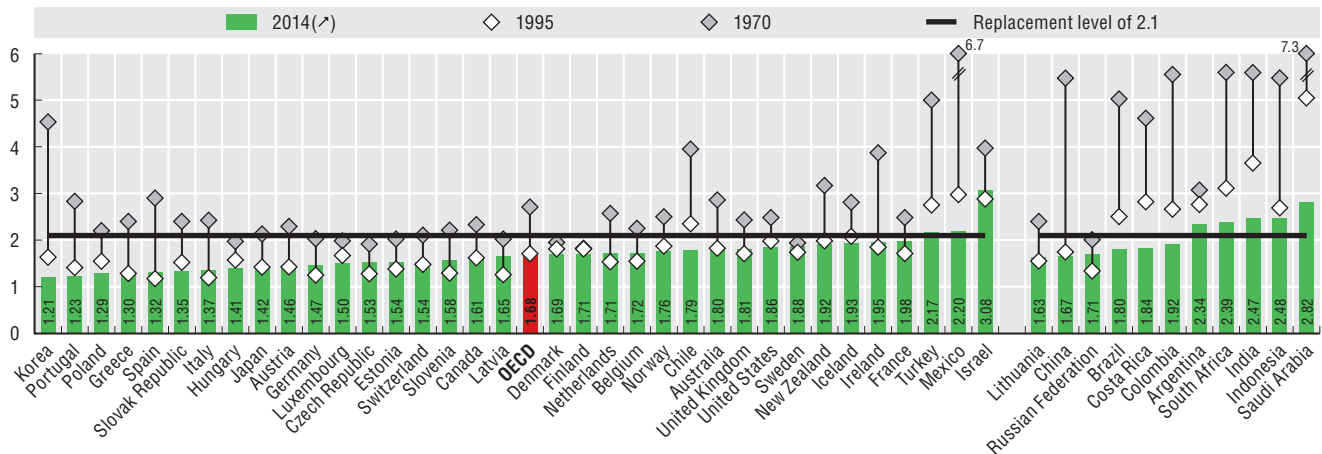
Figure notes

Figure 3.4: 2012 instead of 2013 and 2014 for Canada, 2013 instead of 2014 for Chile and non-EU non OECD countries.

Figure 3.6: Data for the United Kingdom refer to England & Wales only; 2011 for Canada instead of 2014; 1998 for France and Sweden, 1999 for the Slovak Republic instead of 1995; no data available around 1995 for Germany; no data available for both years for Australia, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand and Turkey.

3.4. Fertility rates across the OECD are typically below replacement level

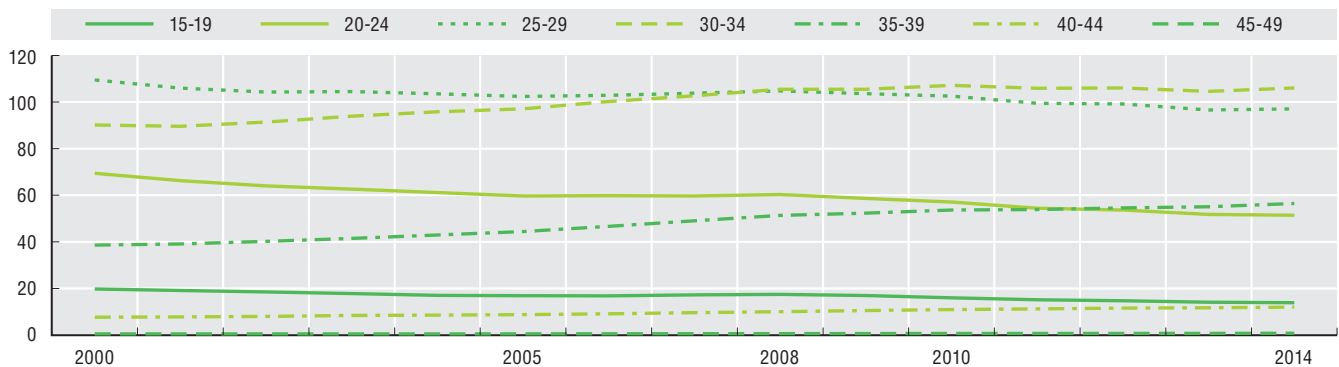
Number of children per woman aged 15 to 49, in 1970, 1995 and 2014 (or nearest year)



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405149>

3.5. Decline in fertility rates for under 30s and increase for over 30s

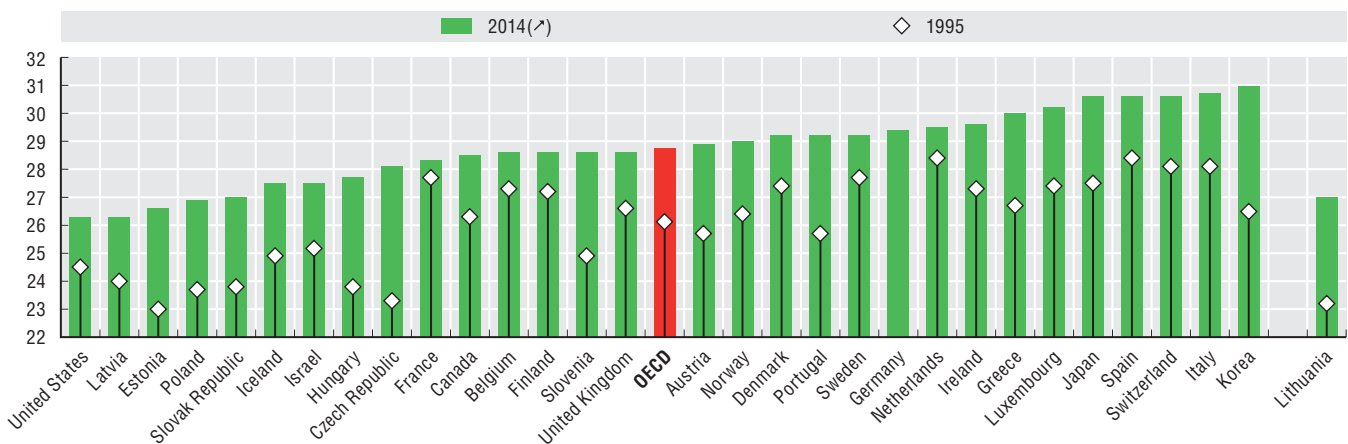
Births per 1 000 women by five-year age group, 2000 to 2014, OECD average



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405155>

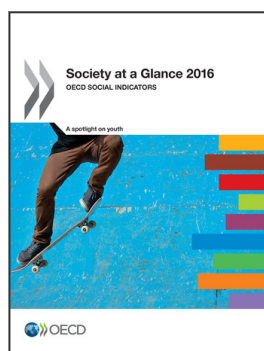
3.6. The average mean age of women at first birth has risen by almost three years in the last two decades

Mean age of women at first birth, 1995 and 2014 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Family Database (Indicator SF2.3), based on Eurostat demographic statistics (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/population-data/database>) and national statistical institutes.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933405161>



From:
Society at a Glance 2016
OECD Social Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264261488-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2016), “Fertility”, in *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2016-7-en

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