

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.

In 2011, fertility was well below the replacement level in most countries, averaging 1.70 across the OECD (Figure 3.3, Panel A). The highest rate was recorded in Israel, where women had almost one child more than in the second country, New Zealand. Israel was in fact the only OECD country with a level above the replacement fertility rate (2.1 children per woman). Anglophone and Nordic countries were typically at the higher end, while continental Europe (France being the one major exception) reported low fertility, along with even lower fertility rates in Japan and South Europe. Fertility rates were notably low in Hungary and Korea, with two parents replacing themselves in the next generation by little more than one child, on average.

Persistent economic uncertainties can reduce the number of children women may have over their reproductive life. **During the crisis years (i.e. between 2008 and 2011), fertility rates fell in more than two-thirds of the OECD countries (Figure 3.3, Panel B):** by almost two decimal points in the United States (a relatively high fertility country) and by one decimal point in five European OECD countries (Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland and Spain) and New Zealand and Turkey. The US rate fell to an all-time low in 2011 at 1.89, down from 2.12 in 2008.

Over the last 50 years, fertility declined dramatically across OECD countries, falling on average from 3.3 children per woman of childbearing age in 1960 to 1.7 in 2011 (Figure 3.4, Panel A). The reasons were postponement of family formation and a decrease in desired family size. Rising female education and employment, insufficient support for families juggling work and children, a need to generate a secure job and income, or growing housing problems may have all also played a role. Falls were especially pronounced – by at least four children per woman on average – in Korea, Mexico and Turkey.

Before the crisis, there was a moderate recovery in average fertility rates between 2000 and 2008. However, trends have been quite heterogeneous (Figure 3.4, Panel B). Fertility rates remained stable in Austria, Japan and Switzerland

– all low fertility countries. Fertility was more likely to rebound in countries with higher initial fertility rates, and even exceeded the replacement level in New Zealand and Iceland. This fertility rebound stalled in many OECD countries in 2009, possibly as a consequence of the economic crisis.

Fertility rates are generally higher in emerging economies; rates are above replacement levels in Argentina, India, Saudi Arabia and South Africa. While fertility increased in Russian Federation by one decimal between 2008 and 2011, fertility decreased in other emerging economies (except Brazil).

Definition and measurement

The total fertility rate is the expected number of children born to each woman at the end of her 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. Data typically come from civil population registers or other administrative records. These are harmonised according to United Nations and Eurostat recommendations. The exception is Turkey, where fertility data are survey-based.

Further reading

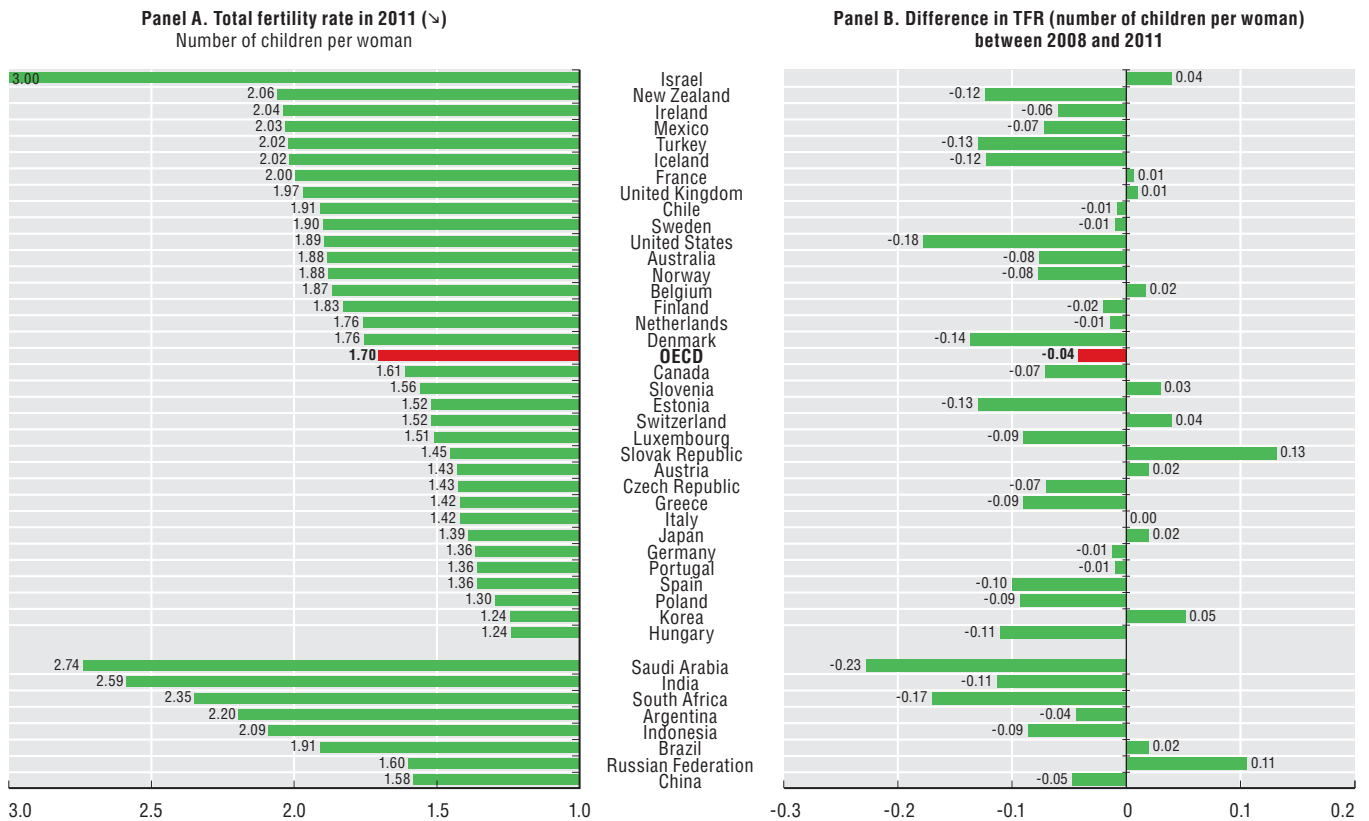
OECD (2013), “SF2.1 Fertility rates”, *OECD Family Database*, www.oecd.org/social/family/database.

Figure note

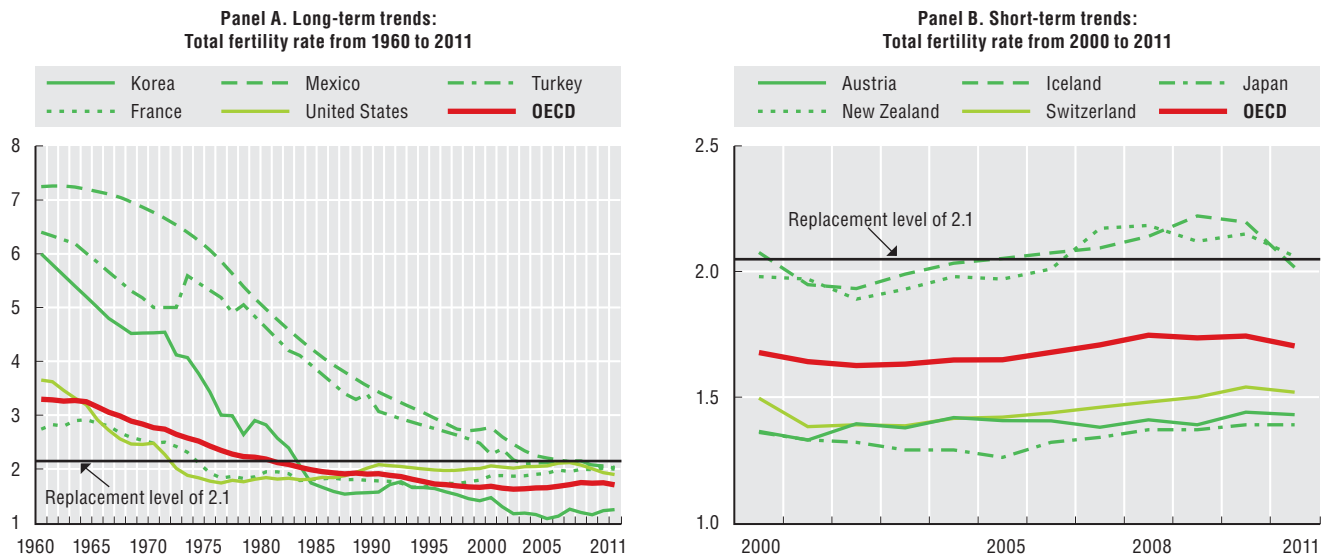
Figure 3.3: 2010 instead of 2011 for Chile.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

3.3. Fertility rates across the OECD are typically below replacement level with a moderate decline since the crisis



3.4. Decline in fertility over the last 50 years, and moderate recovery between 2000 and 2008



Source: National statistical offices and World Development Indicators (<http://data.worldbank.org>) for non-OECD G20 countries.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932966295>



From:
Society at a Glance 2014
OECD Social Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2014-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "Fertility", in *Society at a Glance 2014: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2014-8-en

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