

Key results

The total fertility rate is below the replacement level – the number of children needed to keep the total population constant – in 32 out of 34 OECD countries for 2010-15. The exceptions to this are Israel with a replacement rate of 2.9 and Mexico at 2.2. However in two-thirds of OECD countries there has been a moderate increase in fertility rates over the last decade. Fertility rates have a profound implication for pension systems because they, along with life expectancy, are the drivers of population ageing.

Fertility rates averaged 1.74 across OECD countries in the period 2010-15, well below the level that ensures population replacement. The trend to fewer children has been going on since the 1970s. The fall in fertility rates reflects changes in both individuals' lifestyle preferences and in the constraints of everyday living, such as labour-market insecurity, difficulties in finding suitable housing and unaffordable childcare.

The positive (and widening) gap between the number of children women declare that they want and the number that they actually have shows the influence of these constraints.

Another effect comes from changing marital status. The larger share of women that are unmarried may have depressed fertility rates, particularly in countries where there is a strong link between marriage and maternity, particularly Japan and Korea. The link is also significant in several European countries, such as Greece, Italy, Poland and Switzerland. However, the childbearing patterns of unmarried women have also changed. For example, half or more of births now occur outside of marriage in France, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The average proportion of births outside marriage in OECD countries is now one-third of the total.

The recent increase in fertility rates is predicted to continue, albeit very slowly, with increases of just 0.03 during each five year period. It is forecast to average 1.9 across OECD countries by 2060-65.

Low fertility rates have wider social and economic consequences. First, the decline in population can become self-reinforcing, as the number of women of childbearing age falls. Secondly, there are fewer family carers to help people in old age. Thirdly, there is a growing tax burden on people of working age to finance

pensions and health care for older people. Fourthly, the workforce will also age and so might be less adaptable to technological change, thereby reducing productivity and economic growth. Finally, ageing may result in a smaller pool of savings to finance investment in the economy as older people use their savings to support their consumption.

Among the other major economies, Argentina, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa all currently have fertility rates well above the replacement level of 2.1. Nevertheless, the trend follows that of the OECD countries, with all falling to below replacement by 2030-35.

Definition and measurement

The total fertility rate is the number of children that would be born to each woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and if the likelihood of her giving birth to children at each age was the currently prevailing age-specific fertility rates. It is generally computed by summing up the age-specific fertility rates defined over a five-year interval. A total fertility rate of 2.1 children per women ensures broad stability of the population, on the assumptions of no migration flows and unchanged mortality rates.

Further reading


D'Addio, A.C. and M. Mira d'Ercole (2005), "Trends and Determinants of Fertility Rates: The Role of Policies", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 27, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/880242325663>.

OECD (2009), *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2008-en.

7.1. Total fertility rates, 1980-2065

	1980-85	1990-95	2000-05	2010-15	2020-25	2030-35	2040-45	2050-55	2060-65
OECD members									
Australia	1.91	1.86	1.75	1.88	1.87	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86
Austria	1.60	1.48	1.38	1.47	1.57	1.66	1.71	1.76	1.79
Belgium	1.60	1.61	1.68	1.85	1.89	1.91	1.93	1.94	1.95
Canada	1.63	1.69	1.52	1.66	1.74	1.79	1.82	1.84	1.86
Chile	2.67	2.55	2.00	1.83	1.77	1.77	1.79	1.80	1.82
Czech Republic	2.01	1.66	1.19	1.55	1.71	1.80	1.86	1.89	1.91
Denmark	1.43	1.75	1.76	1.88	1.91	1.92	1.93	1.94	1.95
Estonia	2.09	1.63	1.39	1.59	1.71	1.79	1.84	1.86	1.88
Finland	1.69	1.82	1.75	1.85	1.87	1.88	1.89	1.89	1.90
France	1.87	1.72	1.88	1.98	1.98	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99
Germany	1.46	1.30	1.35	1.42	1.50	1.57	1.62	1.66	1.69
Greece	1.96	1.37	1.28	1.52	1.61	1.69	1.74	1.78	1.80
Hungary	1.82	1.74	1.30	1.41	1.53	1.62	1.69	1.74	1.77
Iceland	2.23	2.19	1.99	2.08	2.00	1.93	1.90	1.88	1.87
Ireland	2.76	1.91	1.97	2.00	1.99	1.98	1.98	1.97	1.97
Israel	3.13	2.93	2.91	2.91	2.69	2.49	2.33	2.19	2.08
Italy	1.54	1.28	1.25	1.48	1.61	1.70	1.76	1.80	1.83
Japan	1.75	1.48	1.30	1.41	1.54	1.63	1.69	1.74	1.78
Korea	2.23	1.70	1.22	1.32	1.46	1.57	1.65	1.71	1.75
Luxembourg	1.47	1.66	1.65	1.67	1.74	1.78	1.82	1.84	1.85
Mexico	4.25	3.16	2.54	2.20	1.94	1.80	1.74	1.74	1.76
Netherlands	1.52	1.58	1.73	1.77	1.81	1.84	1.86	1.87	1.88
New Zealand	1.97	2.07	1.95	2.05	1.94	1.88	1.84	1.83	1.83
Norway	1.69	1.89	1.81	1.93	1.93	1.94	1.94	1.94	1.94
Poland	2.33	1.89	1.27	1.41	1.53	1.62	1.69	1.74	1.77
Portugal	2.01	1.51	1.45	1.32	1.38	1.49	1.58	1.65	1.71
Slovak Republic	2.27	1.87	1.22	1.39	1.52	1.61	1.68	1.73	1.77
Slovenia	1.87	1.36	1.23	1.50	1.60	1.68	1.73	1.77	1.80
Spain	1.88	1.28	1.29	1.50	1.63	1.71	1.77	1.81	1.83
Sweden	1.64	2.01	1.67	1.92	1.95	1.97	1.98	1.99	1.99
Switzerland	1.54	1.54	1.41	1.53	1.62	1.69	1.74	1.77	1.80
Turkey	4.07	2.87	2.33	2.05	1.89	1.80	1.76	1.75	1.77
United Kingdom	1.78	1.78	1.66	1.89	1.89	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90
United States	1.80	2.03	2.04	1.97	1.98	1.98	1.99	1.99	1.99
OECD34	2.04	1.83	1.65	1.74	1.77	1.80	1.82	1.85	1.85
Other major economies									
Argentina	3.15	2.90	2.35	2.18	2.06	1.97	1.91	1.88	1.86
Brazil	3.80	2.60	2.25	1.82	1.71	1.68	1.69	1.72	1.75
China	2.69	2.05	1.55	1.66	1.72	1.76	1.80	1.82	1.84
India	4.47	3.67	3.00	2.50	2.25	2.08	1.96	1.88	1.85
Indonesia	4.11	2.90	2.48	2.35	2.12	1.98	1.89	1.85	1.84
Russian Federation	2.04	1.55	1.30	1.53	1.66	1.74	1.79	1.83	1.85
Saudi Arabia	7.02	5.45	3.54	2.68	2.24	1.98	1.82	1.75	1.73
South Africa	4.56	3.34	2.80	2.40	2.18	2.01	1.91	1.85	1.82
EU27	1.94	1.67	1.46	1.60	1.68	1.74	1.79	1.82	1.84

Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects – 2012 Revision.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932907946>



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