

Definition and measurement

The total fertility rate is the number of children that would be born to each woman at the end of her childbearing years if the likelihood of her giving birth to children at each age was the currently prevailing age-specific fertility rates. It is computed by summing up the age-specific fertility rates defined over five-yearly intervals. Assuming no net migration and unchanged mortality, total fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman ("replacement") ensures broad population stability.

The mean age of mothers at first child birth is computed as the mean of the different ages, weighted by the fertility rate at that age. The share of births outside marriage, is the ratio of the number of live births occurred outside a registered marriage in a year and the total number of living births in the same year.

Data typically come from civil, population registers or other administrative records and are harmonised according to United Nations and Eurostat recommendations. The exception is Turkey, where fertility data are survey-based.

Fertility is low across most of the OECD. Low fertility arises for a variety of reasons. These include changes in lifestyle choices, labour market insecurity, difficulties in finding suitable housing, unaffordable, unavailable or low quality childcare, rising female education levels, reductions in workplace discrimination against women, as well as a failure of policies to provide adequate support to families juggling work and having children. Many of these constraints can explain the long-term decline in fertility rates in OECD countries (D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole, 2005).

Fertility is well below the replacement level in most OECD countries. In 2006, fertility rates averaged 1.65 across OECD countries. The few countries above replacement include Mexico and Turkey (at 2.2) and Iceland and the United States (around 2.1).

Fertility declines can create policy challenges. These include responding to a decline in the availability of family carers in old age, a growing tax burden on

those of working age to finance pensions and health care, an older workforce, and a smaller pool of domestic savings.

There has been a moderate recovery in fertility rates from 2002. In 2002 the average OECD rate was 1.60, recovering to 1.65 in 2006 (GE2.1). The recovery occurs for 17 countries, with the biggest increases in the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Spain, and the Czech Republic. The rebound may be due to an increase of births given by women who have postponed motherhood until their thirties or later (Sardon, 2006). Policy measures, including more support for families and working women, may also have played a role.

Women are having their first child at older ages. The average age of mothers at first childbirth has increased on average by around one year per decade since 1970 (Table GE2.2). Besides contributing to fertility decline, postponement of childbearing has other lasting consequences, increasing the probability that women remain childless or have fewer children than desired. It also increases health risks for both mothers and children.

Women are delaying getting married. In general, countries with higher fertility rates in 2005 also display higher share of births outside marriage (GE2.3). However, cross-country variations are very large. For example both the proportions of births outside marriage and fertility rates are low in countries like Japan, Korea and several Southern European countries, where having children is still closely associated to being married.

Further reading

D'Addio, A.C. and M. Mira d'Ercole (2005), "Trends and Determinants of Fertility Rates in OECD Countries: the Role of Policies", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper, No. 27, OECD, Paris.

OECD (2008), "SF3. Fertility rates", OECD Family database available at: www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database.

Sardon, J. (2006), "Recent Demographic Trends in Europe and the Other Developed Countries", *Population*, Vol. 61, No. 3, pp. 197-266.

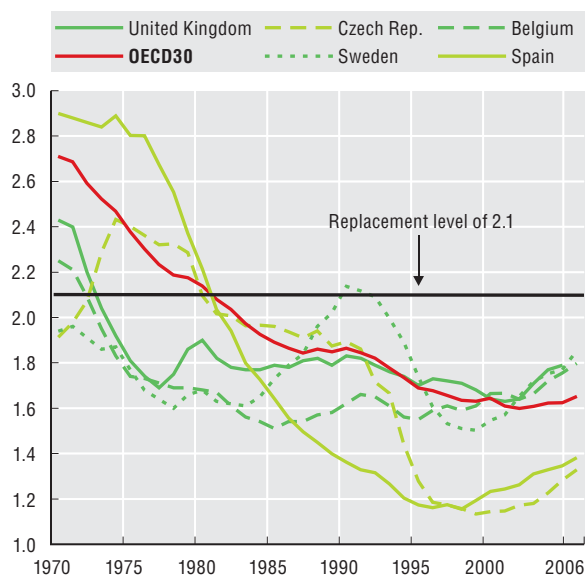
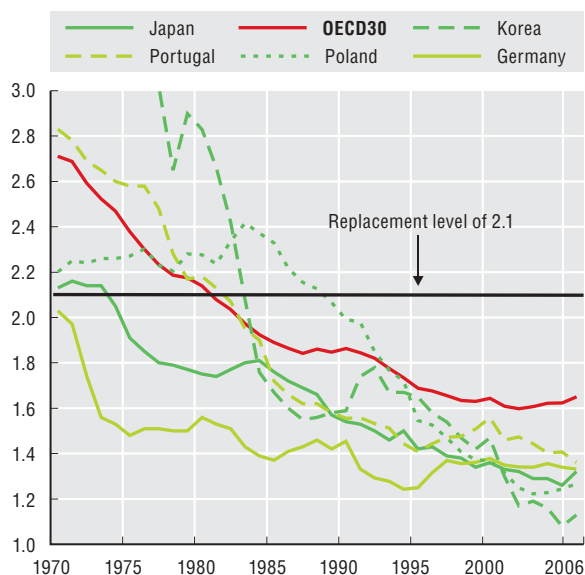
Table and figure notes

Table GE2.2: Note 1: 1992 for Mexico. Note 2: 2001 for New Zealand; 2003 for Mexico. Note 3: 2003 for Finland, Greece, Spain and United Kingdom; 2002 for United States; 2004 for New Zealand; 2006 for Mexico.

Figure GE2.3: Note 1: 2005 for Australia and 2007 for Belgium.

GE2.1. Fertility rates across the OECD are typically below replacement, but a moderate recovery in some countries since the mid-1990s

Total fertility rates from 1970 to 2006



GE2.2. Rising average age of mothers at first childbirth

Mean age of mothers at first childbirth

	1970	1995 ¹	2000 ²	2005 ³
Australia	23.2	26.8	..	28.0
Austria	..	25.6	26.4	27.2
Belgium	24.3	27.3	..	27.4
Czech Republic	22.5	23.3	25.0	26.6
Denmark	23.8	27.4	27.7	28.4
Finland	24.4	27.2	27.4	27.9
France	24.4	28.1	27.9	28.5
Germany	24.0	27.5	28.2	28.1
Greece	25.0	26.6	27.5	28.5
Hungary	22.8	23.8	25.1	26.7
Iceland	21.3	25.0	25.5	26.3
Ireland	..	27.3	27.6	28.5
Italy	25.0	28.0	..	28.7
Japan	25.6	27.5	28.0	29.1
Korean	29.1
Luxembourg	24.7	27.4	28.4	29.0
Mexico	..	20.9	21.0	21.3
Netherlands	24.8	28.4	28.6	28.9
New Zealand	28.0	28.0
Norway	..	26.4	26.9	27.7
Poland	22.8	23.8	24.5	25.8
Portugal	..	25.8	26.5	27.4
Slovak Republic	22.6	23.0	24.2	25.7
Spain	..	28.4	29.1	29.3
Sweden	25.9	27.2	27.9	28.7
Switzerland	25.3	28.1	28.7	29.5
United Kingdom	..	28.3	29.1	29.8
United States	24.1	24.5	24.9	25.1
OECD16	24.0	26.2	26.8	27.7

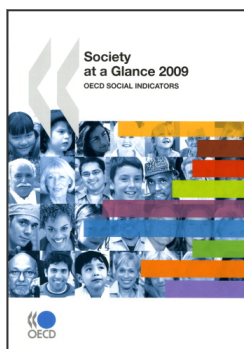
Source: Eurostat and national statistical offices.

GE2.3. Fertility and births outside marriage are positively related

Share of births outside marriage¹ and total fertility rate, 2006



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/550015445534>



From:
Society at a Glance 2009
OECD Social Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2008-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2009), "Fertility rates", in *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2008-6-en

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