

SF2.3: Mean age of mothers at first childbirth

Definitions and methodology

The *mean age of mothers at first child's birth* is defined as the average completed year of age of women when their first child is born. For a given calendar year, the mean age of women at first birth is calculated using the fertility rates for first births by age (in general, the reproductive period is between 15 and 49 years of age).

A more detailed way of comparing trends in fertility timing is to look at the evolution of age-specific fertility rates. Charts SF2.3.C illustrate those rates by age of women from age 16 to 49 years, and consider the birth of children whatever their birth rank. The data presented here are all based on the age of the mother reached during the calendar year.

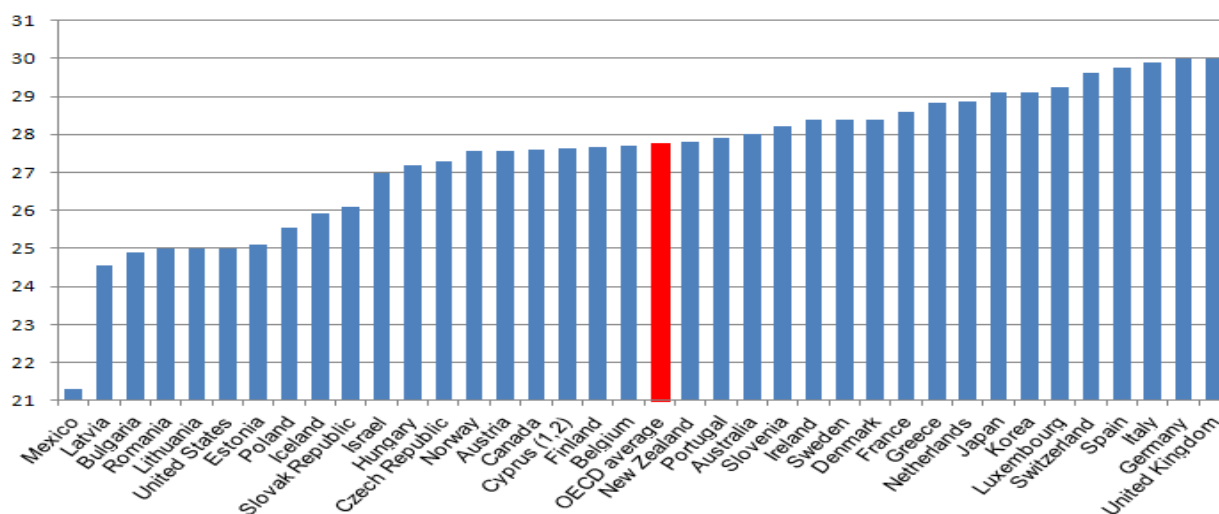
Key findings

In 2009, the mean age of women at the birth of their first child varied significantly across OECD countries from 21.3 years of age in Mexico to 30.5 years in New Zealand (Chart SF2.3.A). In part, these variations relate to changes in the timing of family formation that have occurred over the last decades (SF2.4). Chart SF2.3.B illustrates the postponement of first births that can be observed in the vast majority of countries since the 1970s. In most countries the mean age at first birth increased significantly from 1970 to the mid-1990s, with the increase largest in France and Netherlands, and continued to rise after that period but at a slower pace. By contrast, the postponement of the first birth was more pronounced from the mid-1990s in Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Portugal and Korea.

Charts SF2.3.C illustrates the age profile of fertility and changes therein from 1970 to 2009 for selected OECD countries where data is available. This figure shows both a decrease in age-specific fertility rates and a postponement of birth over the life-cycle. In all countries, fertility rates were much higher around age 20 to 25 in the early 1970s. Nowadays, first childbirths often occur when women are in their late twenties. Chart SF2.3.C also illustrates that the postponement of family formation is related to two trends: a decrease in fertility before age 30 for women, and an increase of fertility at older ages. In all countries, fertility rates at age 25-30 have decreased drastically, particularly over the 1970 to 1995 period. The decline has continued in many countries but at a lower rate. Moreover, fertility at later ages started to increase significantly from the mid-1990s in many countries. The convergence of these two trends (a reduction in fertility rates at younger ages and an increase of fertility at a later age) contributes to fertility rates holding up around 2 children per woman in some OECD countries (SF2.1).

Other relevant indicators: Family size and composition (SF1.1); Fertility rates (SF2.1); Share of births outside marriage (SF2.4); and Marriage and divorce rates (SF3.1).

Chart SF2.3.A: Mean age of women at the birth of the first child, 2009*



Countries are ranked in ascending order of the mean age of mothers at first birth in 2009.

Note: * Data refers to 2007 for Canada and Italy; 2006 for Mexico, the United States, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom; 2005 for Australia, Denmark, Japan, Korea and New Zealand.

1 Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to "Cyprus" relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

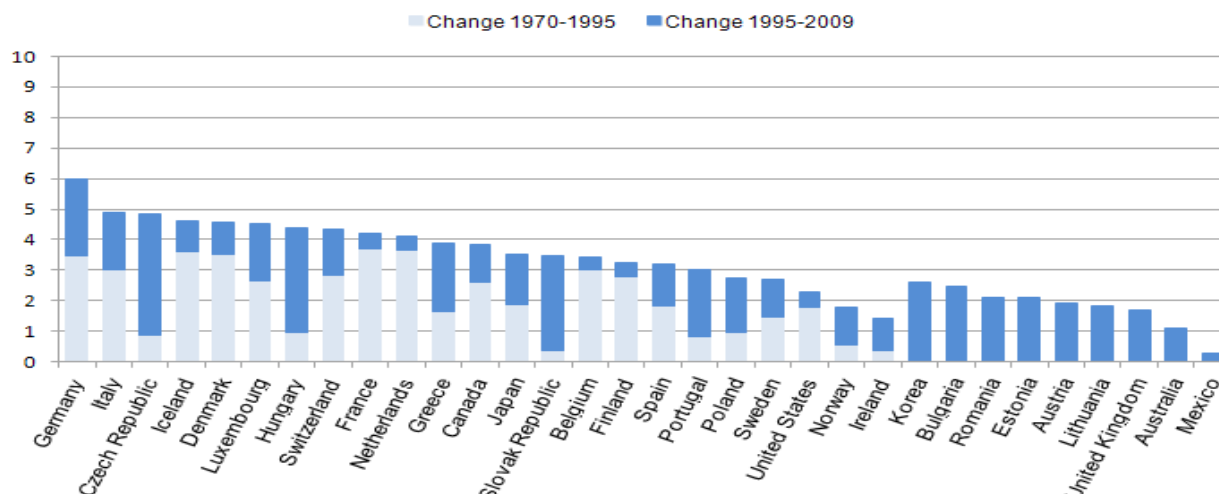
2 Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

3 The data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Sources: Eurostat, 2012, and United Nations Statistical Division, 2011, and National Statistical Offices, 2011.

Chart SF2.3.B: The postponement of the first birth in 2009, since 1970*

Change in the mean age of women at the birth of the first child



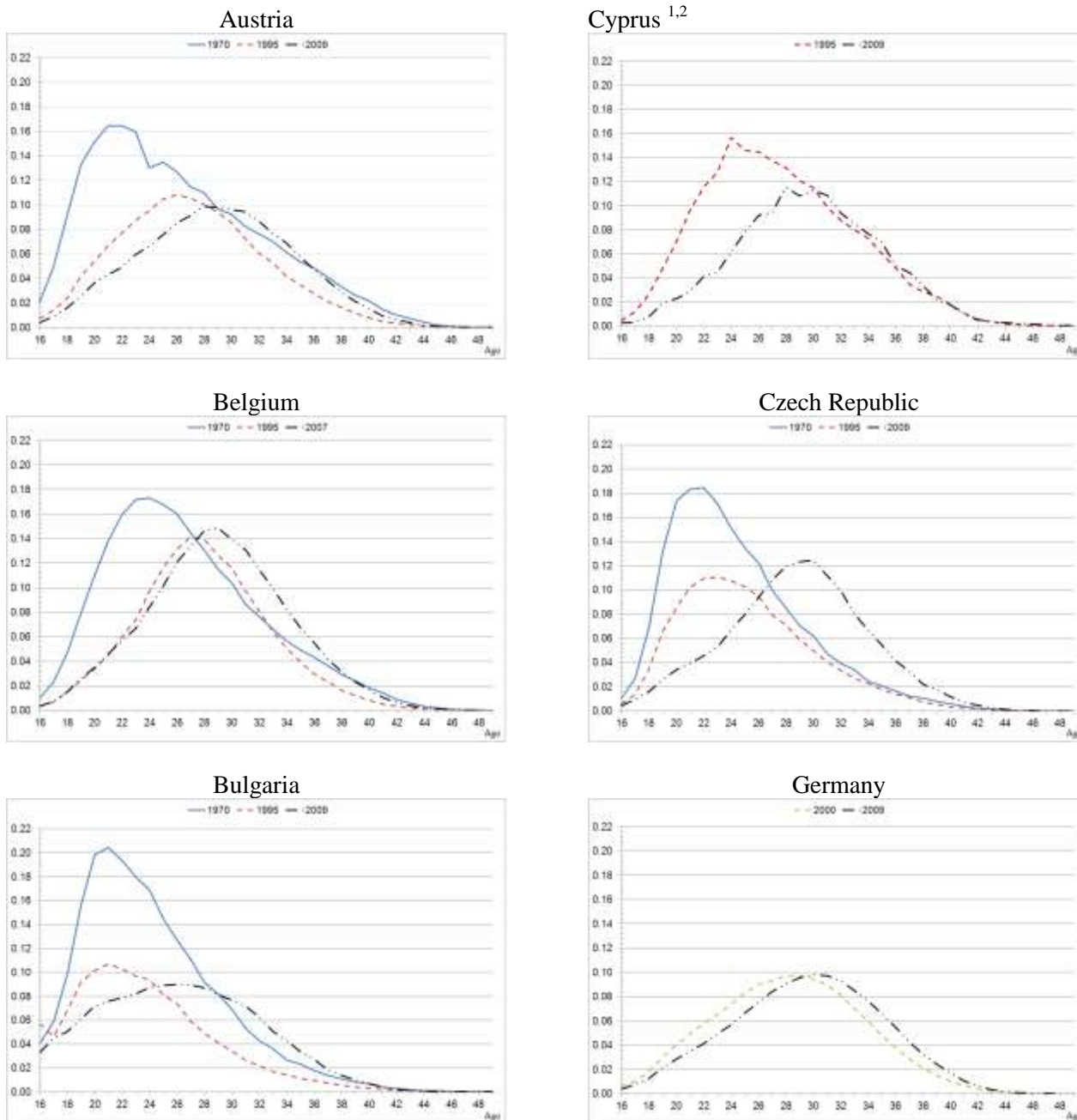
Countries are ranked by descending order of the delay of first childbirth that occurred from 1970 to 2009 where data is available. Otherwise countries are ranked based on the delay from 1995 to 2009.

Note: * For 2009 data refers to 2007 for Canada and Italy; 2006 for Mexico, the United States, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom; 2005 for Australia, Denmark, Japan and Korea. Data for 1970 is not available for Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Korea, Lithuania and Romania.

Sources: Eurostat, 2012, United Nations Statistical Division, 2011, and National Statistical Offices, 2011.

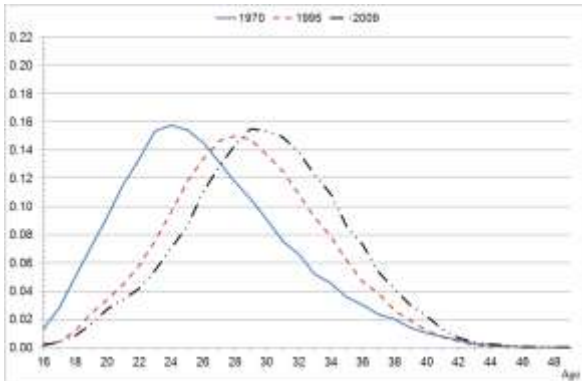
Chart SF2.3.C: Age-specific profiles of fertility rates, 1970-2009

Annual number of live births per 1,000 women of given age

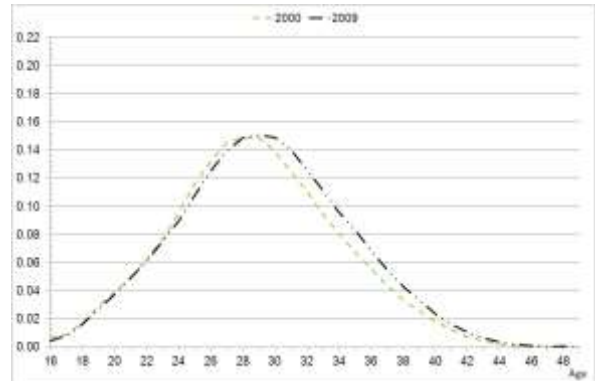


1 and 2, see notes 1 and 2 for Chart SF2.3.A.
 Source: Eurostat, 2012.

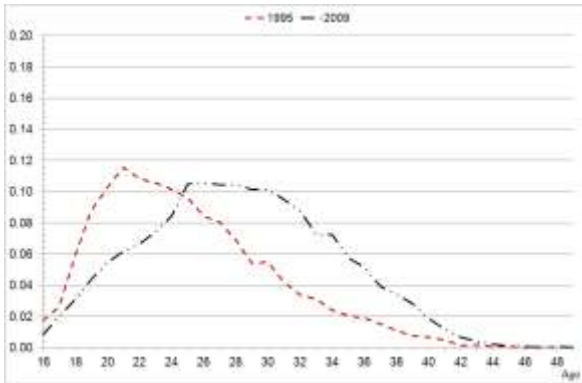
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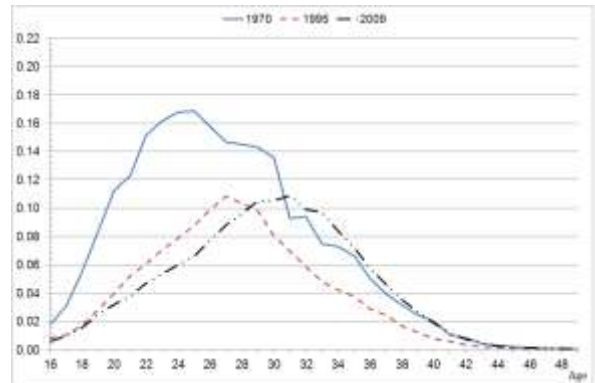
France



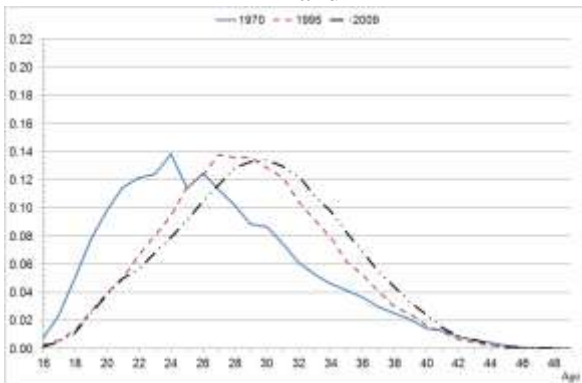
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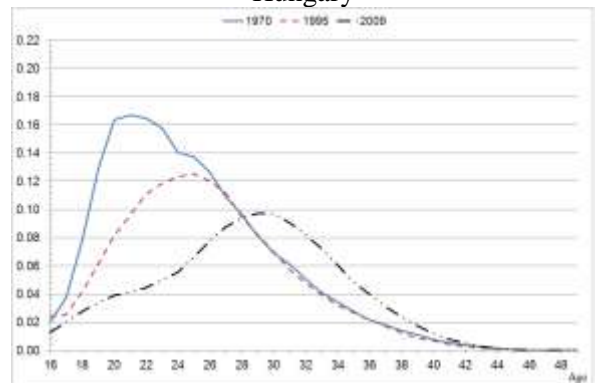
Greece



Finland



Hungary

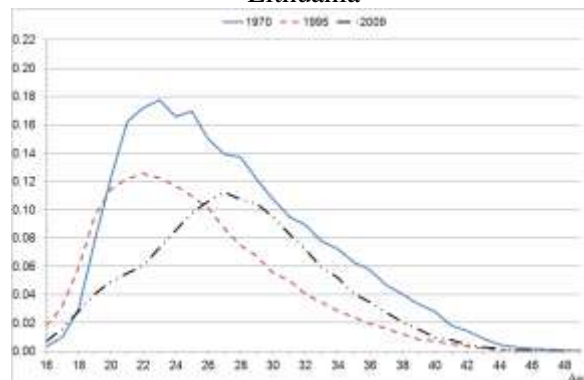


Source: Eurostat, 2012.

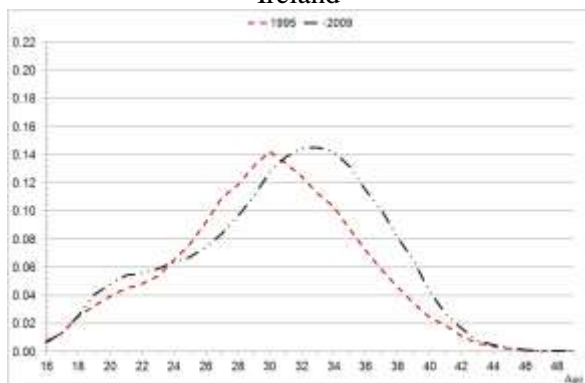
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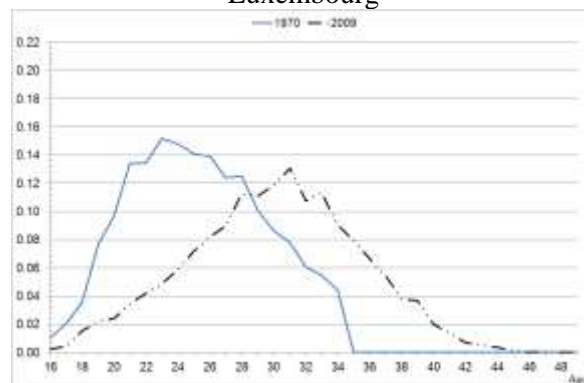
Lithuania



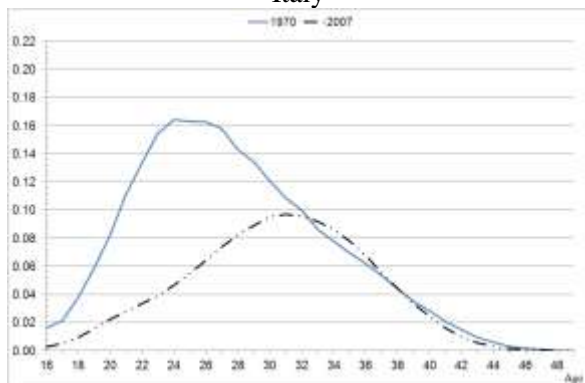
Ireland



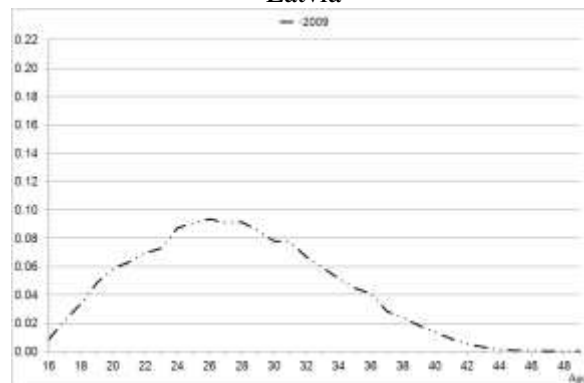
Luxembourg



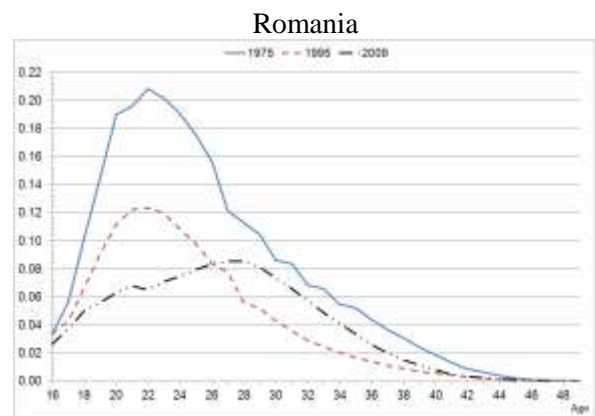
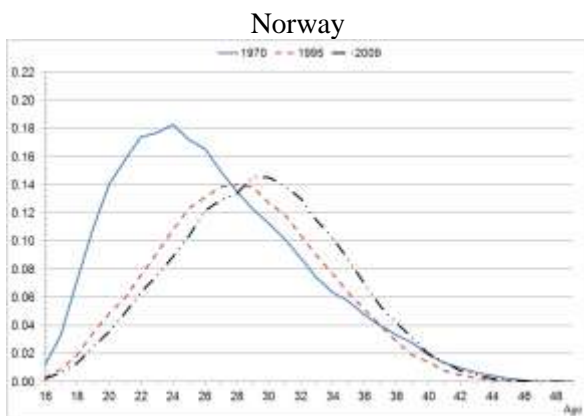
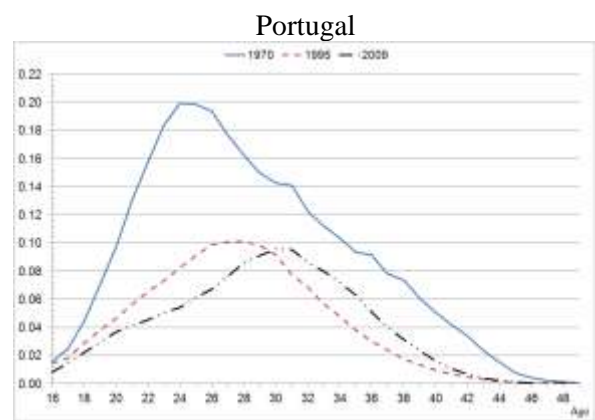
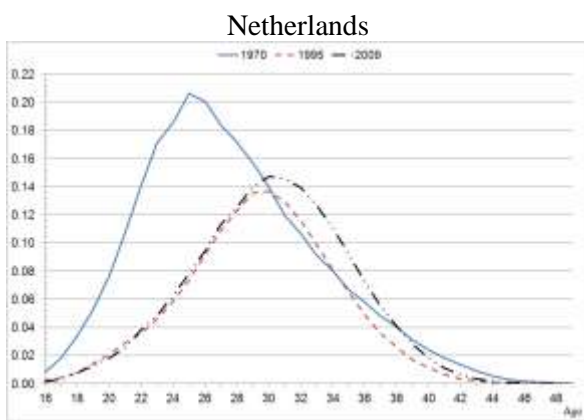
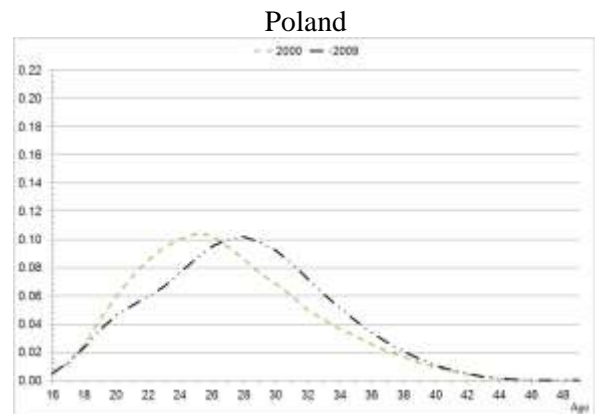
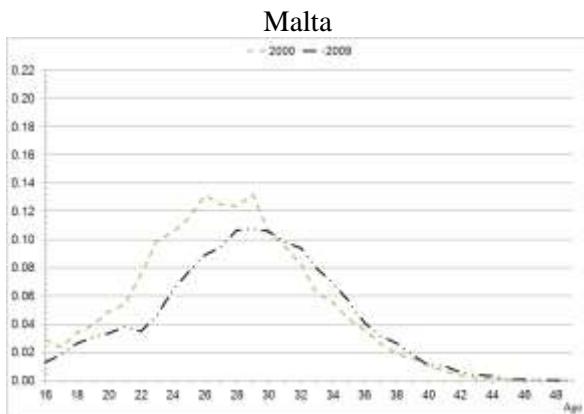
Italy



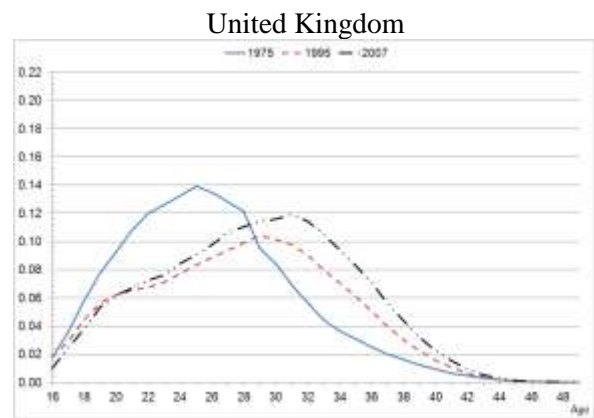
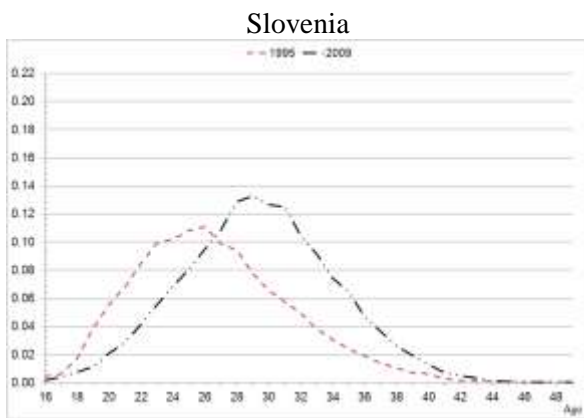
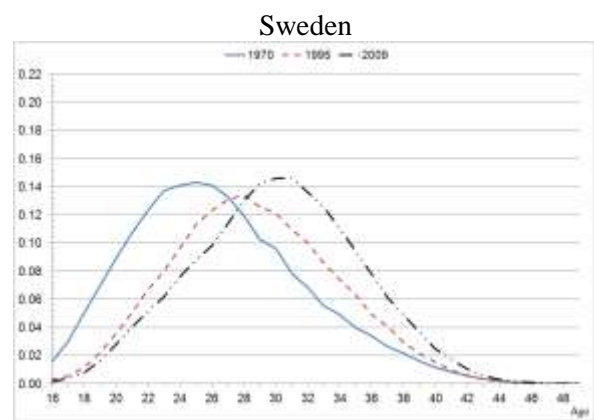
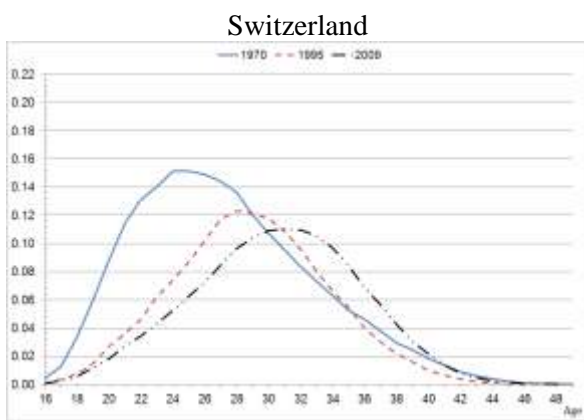
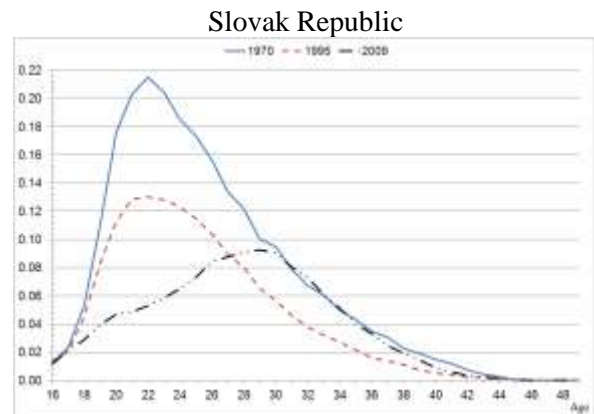
Latvia



Source: Eurostat, 2012.



Source: Eurostat, 2012.



Source: Eurostat, 2012.

Comparability and data issues

The disaggregation of fertility rates by year of age of the mother is useful in order to identify changes in fertility timing which amongst other things affect trends in total fertility rates (SF2.1). The age profiles above have illustrated that fertility at younger ages is declining while increasing at older ages. The consequences of these changes in timing on overall fertility levels is not exactly clear although it seems that in most countries completed fertility rates are now below replacement levels (SF2.1).

“Fertility rates by birth order”, “tempo-controlled estimates of fertility trends” or “the time between two births” are among the indicators that can help cast light on the changes in fertility timing and help separate both the timing and quantum dimensions in the analysis of fertility evolution (see Potančoková *et al.* (2008) and other references below).

Sources and 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, Paris; *OECD Society at a Glance* (Edition 2006); Nimwegen N. van and C. Beets (2008), “The demographic situation in the European Union”, in *Demographic Trends, Socio-Economic Impacts and Policy Implications in the European Union*, Monitoring report for the European Observatory on the Social Situation – 2007; Bongaarts J., G. Feeney (2006), “The quantum and tempo of life-cycle events”, *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, pp. 115-51; Lutz W., and V Skirbekk (2005), Policies addressing the tempo effect in low fertility countries”, *Population and Development Review*, 31(4):699-730; Potančoková M., T. Sobotka, and D. Philipov (2008), *European Demographic data sheet - Estimating tempo effect and adjusted TFR*, Vienna Institute for demography, Rallu J-L, and L. Toulemon (1994), Period Fertility measures: the construction of different indices and their Application to France 1946-1989, *Population* (English Selection), vol 6, pp. 59-93; UN Demographic Database: <http://data.un.org/>