

SF2.3: Age of mothers at childbirth and age-specific fertility

Definitions and methodology

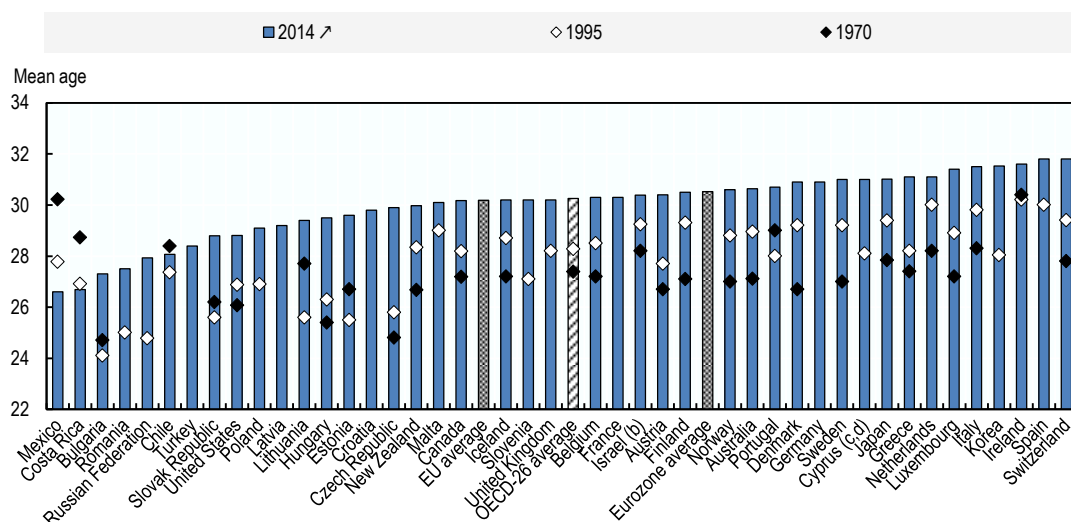
This indicator contains information on the age of mothers at childbirth and levels of fertility across age groups. It is based on two main measures:

- *Mean age of mothers at birth*, calculated as the simple mean average age in years of women at childbirth. The mean age of mothers at birth is shown both for all births and also for first births only.
- *Age-specific fertility rates*, calculated as the number of births per 1000 women of a given age in a given year. As a means of simplification, age-specific fertility rates are presented here per five-year age group and with particularly focus on fertility among adolescent (15-19 year old) women.

Key findings

In most OECD countries, the mean age of women at childbirth is 30 or above (Chart SF2.3.A). Only in one OECD country (Mexico) is the mean age of women at childbirth 28 or less, and in only eight (Chile, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Turkey and the United States) is it between 28 and 30. In the remaining 25 OECD countries the mean age of women at childbirth is at least 30, with this rising as high as 31.6 in Ireland and 31.8 in Spain and Switzerland.

Chart SF2.3.A. Mean age of women at birth, 1970, 1995 and 2014^a



a) Data for Canada and Mexico refer to 2011, for Chile to 2012, and for Australia, Israel, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the United States, the Russian Federation and Costa Rica refer to 2013

b) The statistical 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.

c) 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";

d) 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.

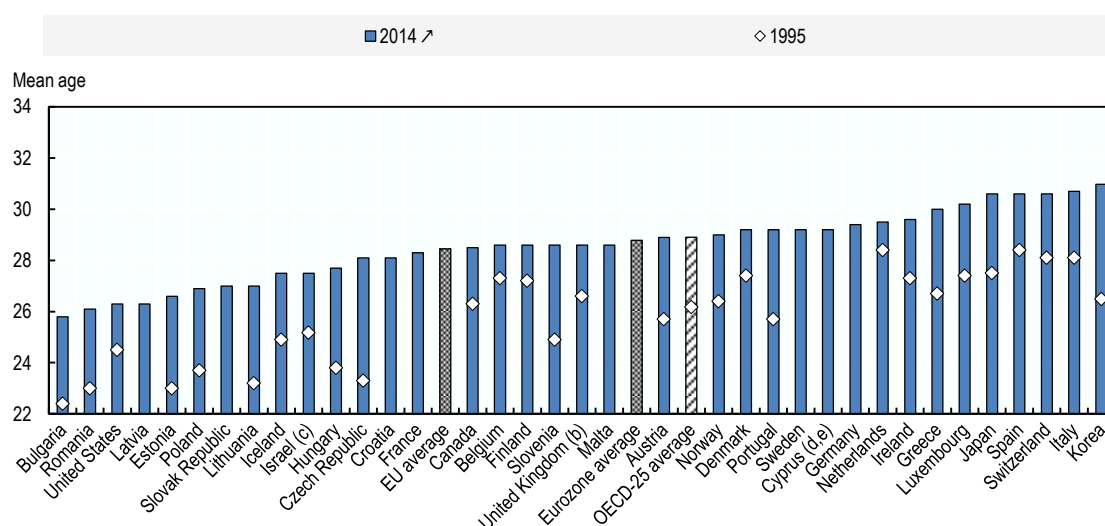
Sources: [for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics](#); [for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2015](#)

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).

The number of countries with a current mean age at childbirth of 30 or above is considerably higher than in earlier years. In 1970, for example, only one OECD country (Ireland) had a mean age of 30 or above, and even by 1995 the number stood at only three (Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain). This largely reflects a shift across OECD countries towards delayed childbearing – between 1970 and 2014, most OECD countries experienced an increase in the mean age of women giving birth of between 2 and 4 years, with the OECD-26 average age increasing from 27.4 to 30.3. Only in Chile and Mexico has the mean age of women at childbirth decreased since 1970, with the former falling by 0.3 years and the latter by 3.6.

Increases in the mean age of women at childbirth are driven at least in part by a trend towards postponement of the first birth (Chart SF2.3.B). Current mean ages at first birth vary considerably across OECD countries – in the United States, for example, the average age at which women give birth to a first child is 26.3, whereas in Korea it is as high as 31.0. However, all OECD countries have seen the mean age at first birth have increase since 1995, with most recording an increase of at least 2 years. The OECD-25 average mean age at first birth has risen by almost 3 years, from 26.2 in 1995 to 28.9 in 2014.

Chart SF2.3.B. Mean age of women at first birth, 1970, 1995 and 2014^a



a) Data for Canada refer to 2011

b) Data for the United Kingdom refer to England & Wales only. For the years 1995, data are based on a mixture of register information and survey-based estimation. For 2014, data are based on register information only.

c) see note b) in chart SF2.3.A

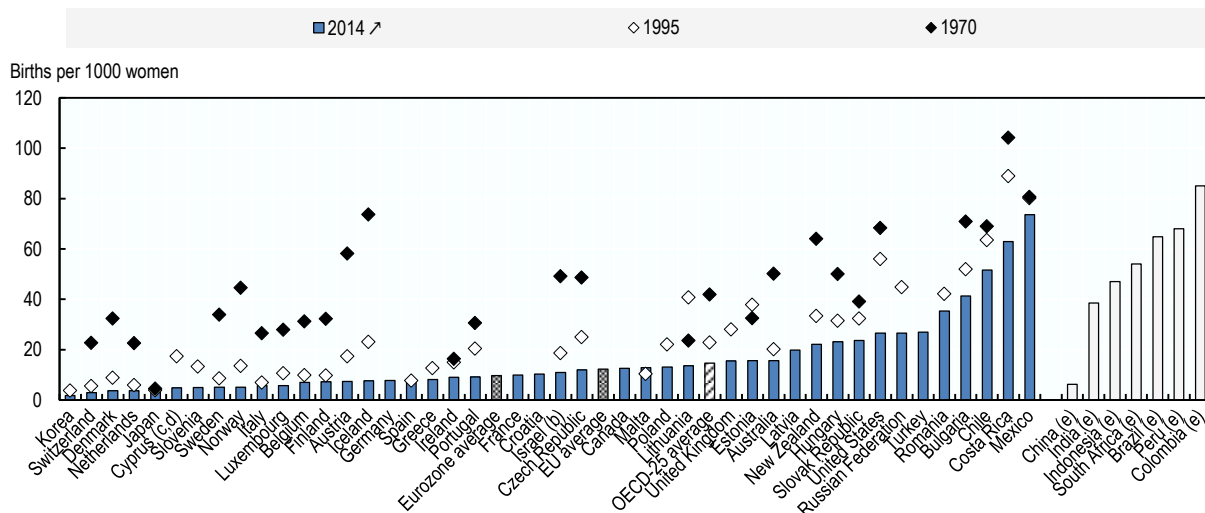
d) see note c) in chart SF2.3.A

e) see note d) in chart SF2.3.A

Sources: for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Canada, Statistics Canada; for Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics; for Japan, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; for Korea, KOSIS; for the UK, Office for National Statistics; for the United States, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

The shift towards postponement of the first birth is reflected in trends in adolescent fertility rates (Chart SF2.3.C). On average across OECD countries, current fertility rates for women aged 15-19 stand at just 15 births per 1000 women aged 15-19, down a third from 23 in 1995 and almost two-thirds from 42 in 1970. Similar decreases are recorded in almost all OECD countries, particularly between 1970 and 1995. However, adolescent fertility rates remain high in some OECD countries. In Chile, for example, the current adolescent fertility rate is as high as 52 births per 1000 women aged 15-19. In Mexico it is 73.6, over 5 times as high as the OECD average.

Chart SF2.3.C. Adolescent fertility rates, 1970, 1995 and 2014^a
 Births per woman, 15-19 year olds



a) Data for Colombia and South Africa refer to 2007, for China, India and Indonesia to 2009, for Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Peru to 2011, for Australia and Chile to 2012, and for Israel, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the United States, the Russian Federation and Costa Rica to 2013

b) see note b) in chart SF2.3.A

c) see note c) in chart SF2.3.A

d) see note d) in chart SF2.3.A

e) Data for Brazil, Colombia, China, India, Indonesia, Peru and South Africa are estimates and/or are based on survey data rather than register data. See the UNDESA webpage for more detail: <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/fertility/>

Sources: for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Brazil, Colombia, China, India, Indonesia, Peru and South Africa, United Nations 2015 Update for the MDG Database: Adolescent Birth Rate; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2015

But the effects of the delay in childbearing are best illustrated by looking at shifts in fertility across age groups. Chart SF2.3.D shows, by country, age-specific fertility rates by five year age groups for the years 1970, 1995 and 2014. In almost all OECD countries, current fertility rates among 20-24 year olds and 25-29 year olds are much lower than they were 1970. Much of the decline in fertility among women aged 20-29 occurred between 1970 and 1995, but in many countries fertility rates for women in their 20s have continued to fall since 1995. Conversely, current fertility rates for women aged 30-34 and 35-39 are in a number of countries slightly higher than they were in 1970. In fact, in several countries – such as Australia, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom – fertility rates among 30-34 year olds have increased to the point where they are now higher than among any other age group. This does not hold in all cases – some countries, such as Chile, Ireland, Korea, Mexico and Portugal, have seen fertility rates decline across the board. Broadly though, Chart SF2.3.D shows that in addition to a general decline in fertility (see indicator SF2.1. Fertility rates), many OECD countries have seen the focus of childbearing shift to later age groups.

Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970^a, 1995^b, and 2014^c
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

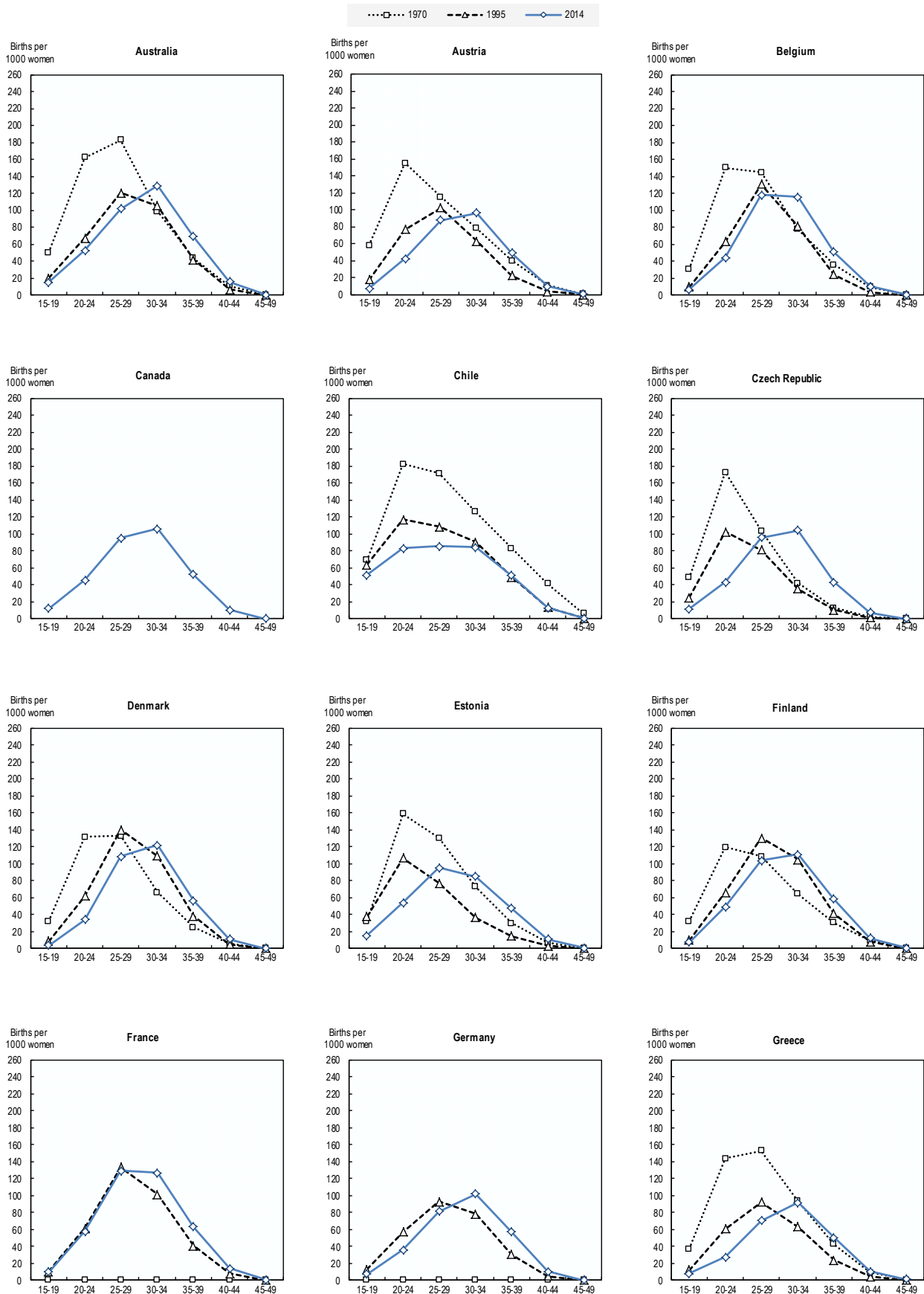


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970^a, 1995^b, and 2014^c (cont.)
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

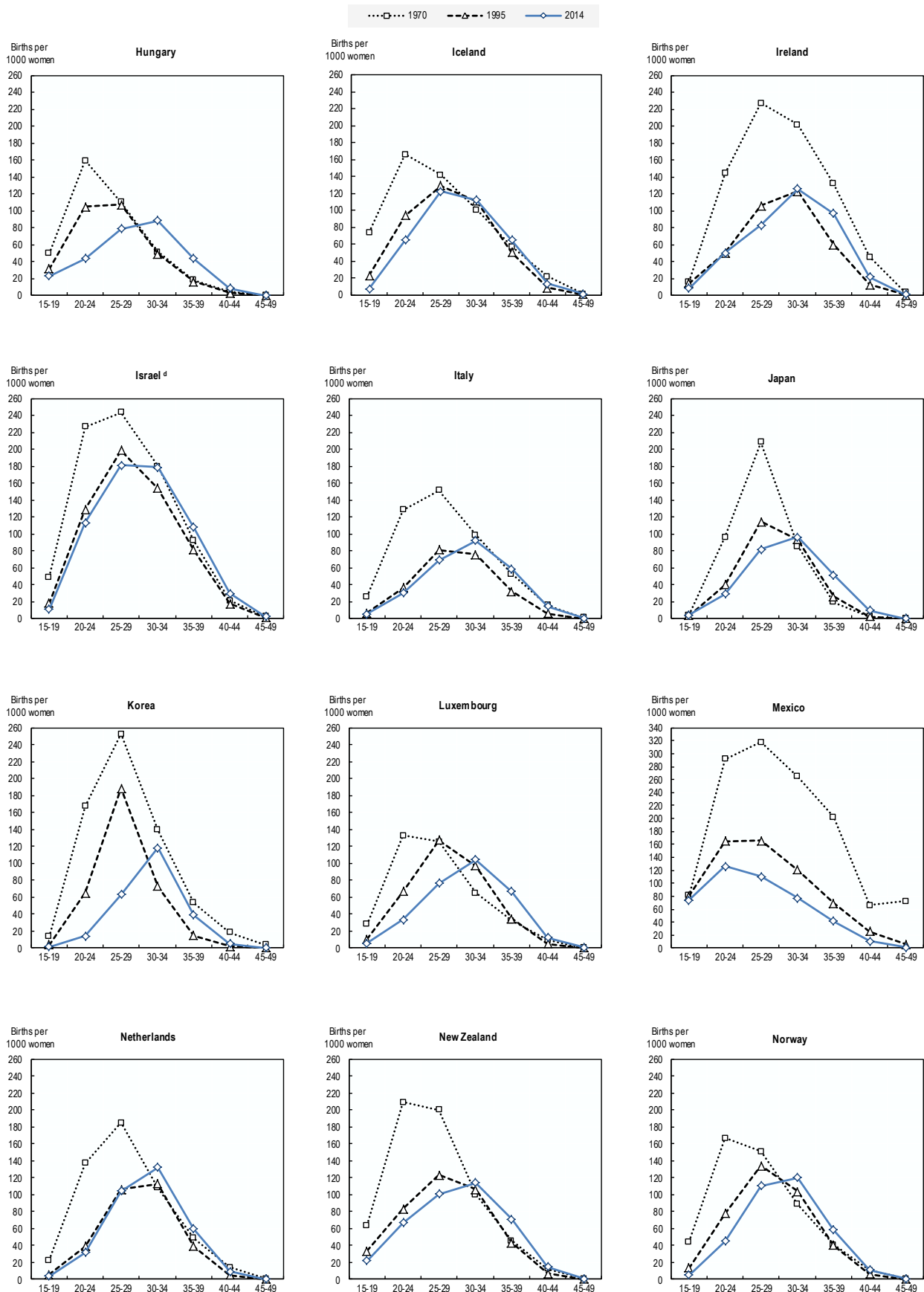


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970^a, 1995^b, and 2014^c (cont.)
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

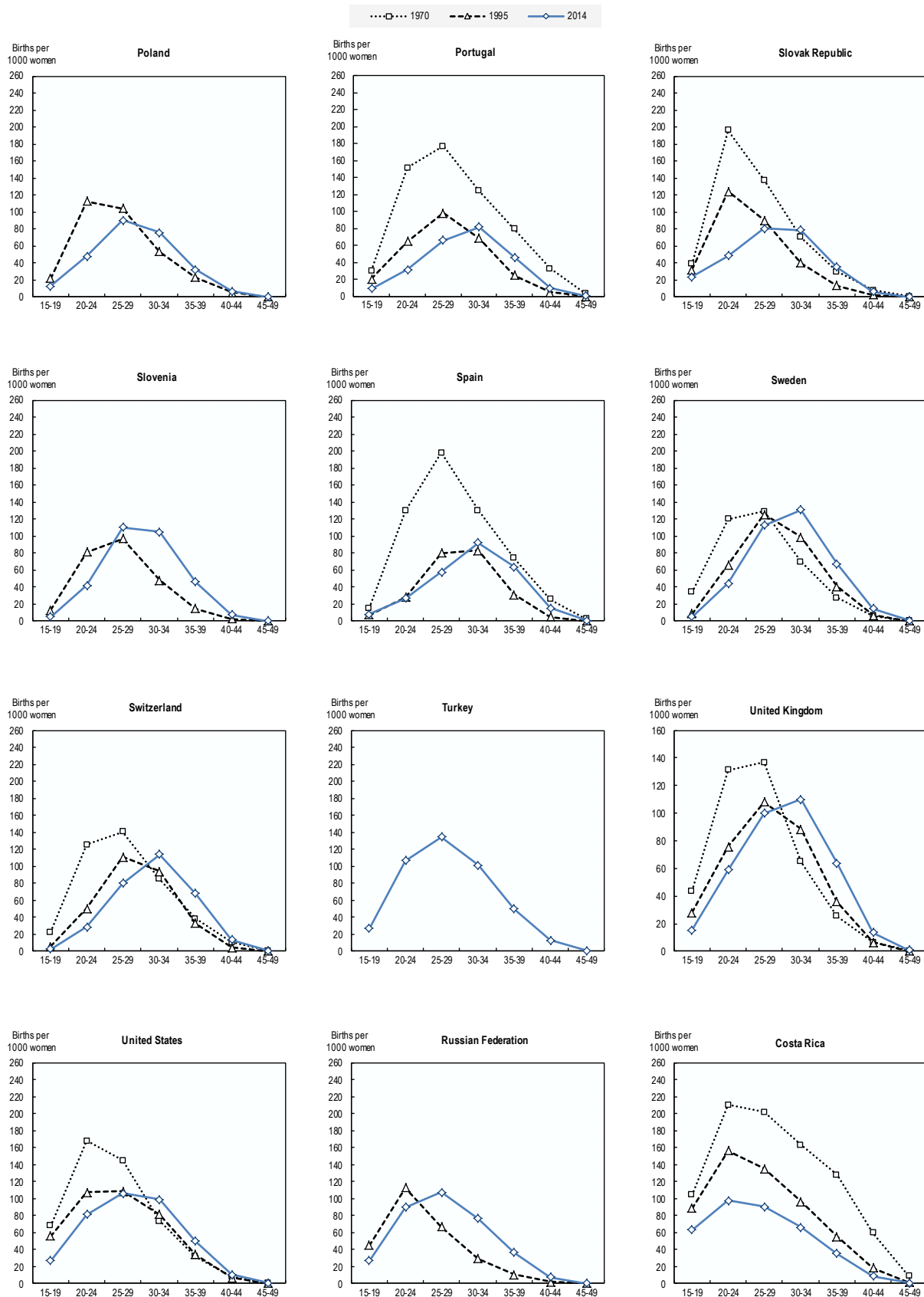
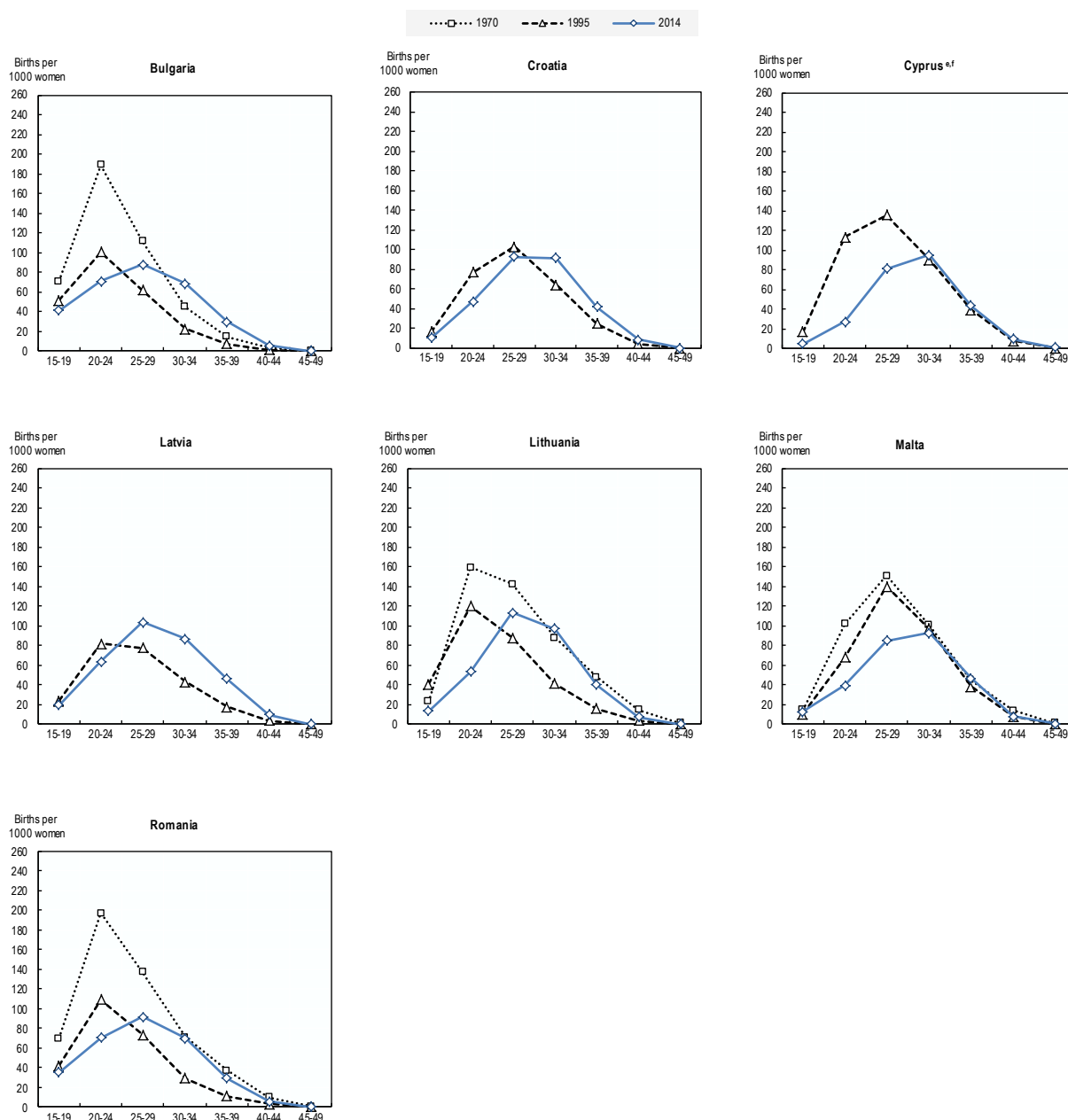


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970^a, 1995^b, and 2014^c (cont.)
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group



a) Data for Spain refer to 1971, for the United Kingdom to 1973, for Korea and Romania to 1975 and for Malta to 1977

b) Data for France refer to 1998, for Canada, Germany and Latvia to 2000, and for Croatia to 2001

c) Data for Canada and Mexico refer to 2011, for Australia and Chile to 2012, and for Israel, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the United States, the Russian Federation and Costa Rica to 2013

d) See note b) to Chart SF2.3.A

e) See note c) to Chart SF2.3.A

f) See note d) to Chart SF2.3.A

Sources: [for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2015](#)

Comparability and data issues

The disaggregation of fertility rates by mother's age is useful as a means of identifying changes in the timing of fertility which, amongst other things, affect trends in the total fertility rate (SF2.1). The age profiles above show that women are postponing childbearing with fertility declining at younger ages and increasing at older ages. The consequences of these changes in timing on overall levels of fertility are not always exactly clear but postponement of

childbirth is likely to lead to the underestimation of fertility as measured by the total fertility rate (Hvidtfeldt et al, 2010).

“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 changes in the timing of fertility 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 Mira d’Ercole M. (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; Hvidtfeldt, U. A., M. Gerster, L.B. Knudsen and N. Keiding (2010), “Are low Danish fertility rates explained by changes in timing of births?”. *Scandinavian journal of public health*, 38(4), pp. 426-33.