

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:

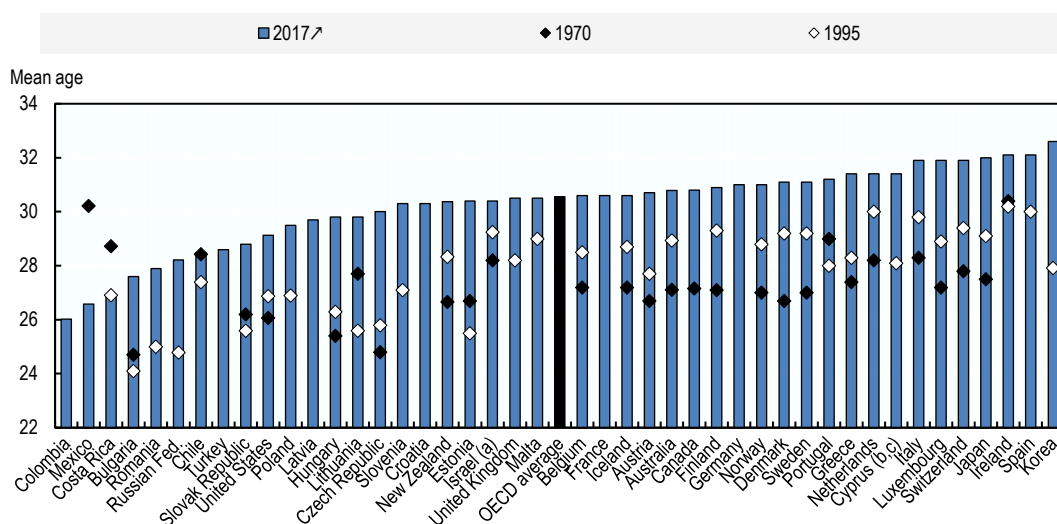
- *Mean age of mothers at birth*, calculated as the simple mean average age in years of women at childbirth. The mean age of mothers at birth is shown both for all births and also for first births only.
- *Age-specific fertility rates*, calculated as the number of births per 1000 women of a given age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

Key findings

In most OECD countries, the average age at which women give birth now stands at 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, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Turkey and the United States) is it between 28 and 30. In all remaining OECD countries, the average age of women at childbirth is at least 30. In several OECD countries (e.g. Japan, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland), the average age is about or above 32.

Most OECD countries have seen the average age of women at childbirth increase in recent decades. Between 1970 and 2017, most OECD countries saw the mean age increase by somewhere between 2 and 5 years, with the largest increase (5.2 years) in the Czech Republic. However, Mexico has seen the opposite – there, the mean age of women at childbirth has decreased since 1970, by just over 3.6 years.

Chart SF2.3.A. Mean age of women at birth, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available



Note: For 2017, data for Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico to 2014, for Australia, the United States and the Russian Federation to 2015, and for Canada, New Zealand, and Turkey refer to 2016.

a. 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.

b. 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";

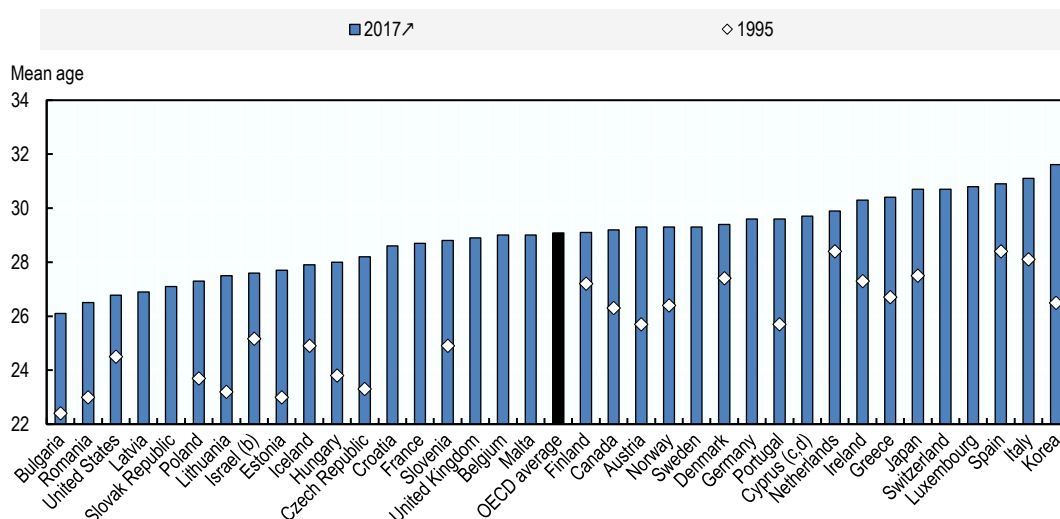
c. Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the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

Sources: for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2017

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).

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 26.8, whereas in Korea it is as high as 31.6. All OECD countries with available data have seen the mean age at first birth have increase since 1995, with most recording an increase of at least 2 years. In Korea and the Czech Republic, it has risen by around 5 years.

Chart SF2.3.B. Mean age of women at first birth, 1995 and 2017 or latest available



Notes: For 2017, data for Canada refer to 2016.

a. 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 the latest year, data are based on register information only.

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

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

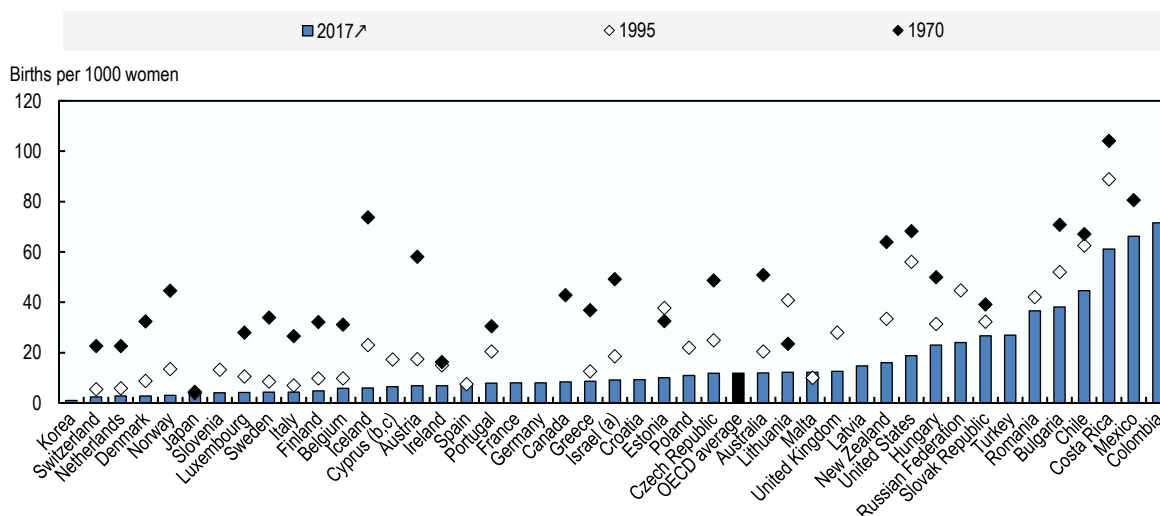
d. see note c. in chart SF2.3.A

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 11.8 births per 1000 women aged 15-19. All OECD countries have seen adolescent fertility fall over the past few decades, sometimes by as much as 50 or more births per 1000 women aged 15-19 (e.g. Austria, Iceland, New Zealand and the United States). However, adolescent fertility rates remain high in some OECD countries. In Chile, for example, the current adolescent fertility rate is 44.7 births per 1000 women aged 15-19. In Mexico, it stands at 66.2 births per 1000 women aged 15-19 – over five times higher than the OECD average.

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 2016. In almost all OECD countries, fertility rates among 20-24 year olds and 25-29 year olds are much lower today than they were in 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 in several OECD countries are actually slightly higher than they were in 1970. In fact, in many countries – such as Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, 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 is not the case in *all* OECD countries – some, such as Chile, Iceland, Ireland, and Mexico have seen fertility rates decline across almost all age groups. 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.C. Adolescent fertility rate, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available
 Births per 1000 women, 15-19 year olds



Notes: Data for Chile, Mexico, Turkey, Colombia and Costa Rica to 2014, for Australia and the Russian Federation to 2015, and for Canada and New Zealand to 2016.
 a. see note a. in chart SF2.3.A
 b. see note b. in chart SF2.3.A
 c. see note c. in chart SF2.3.A
 Sources: [for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2017](#)

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.

Chart SF2.3.D. **Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available**
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

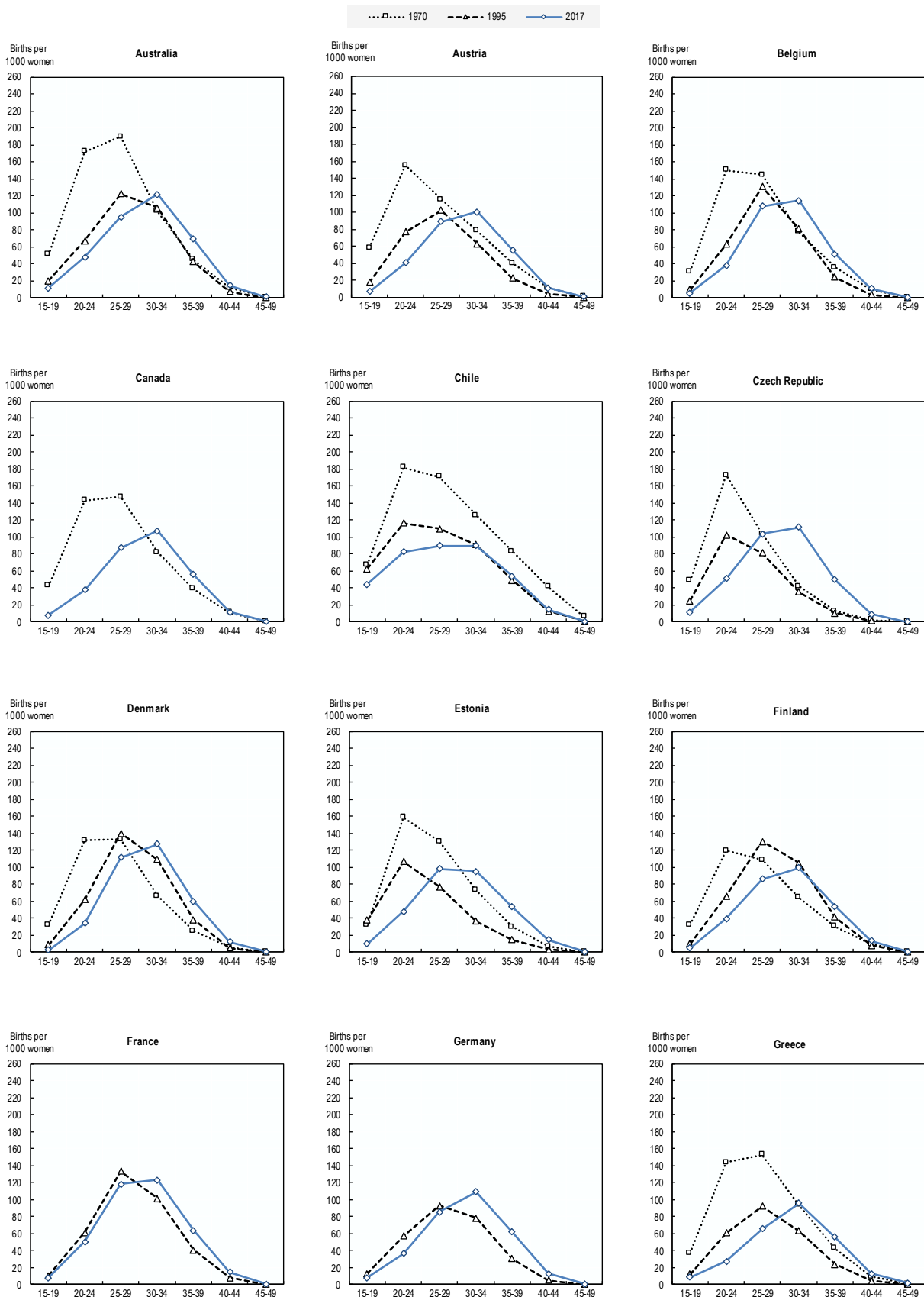


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available (cont.)
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

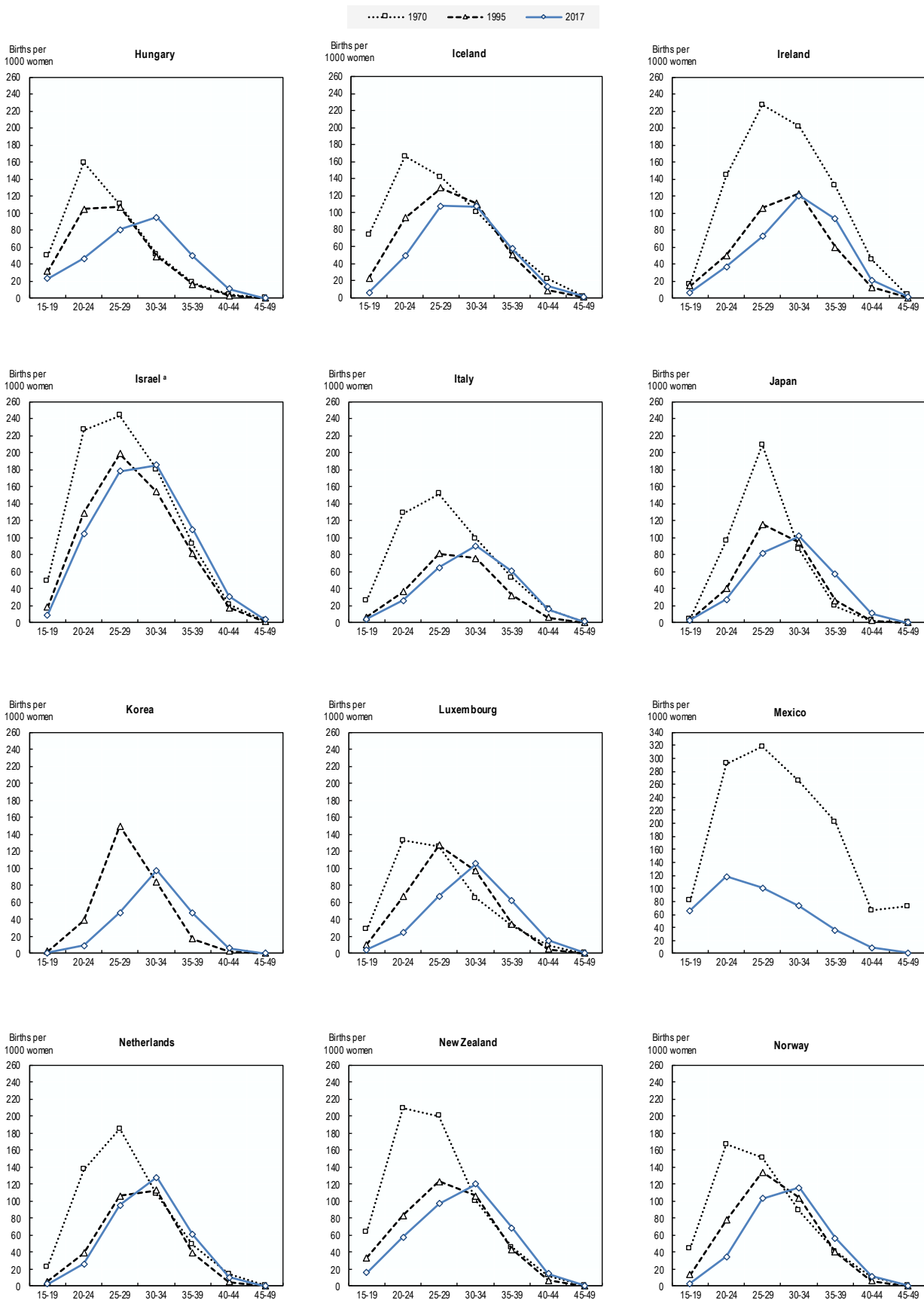


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available (cont.)
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

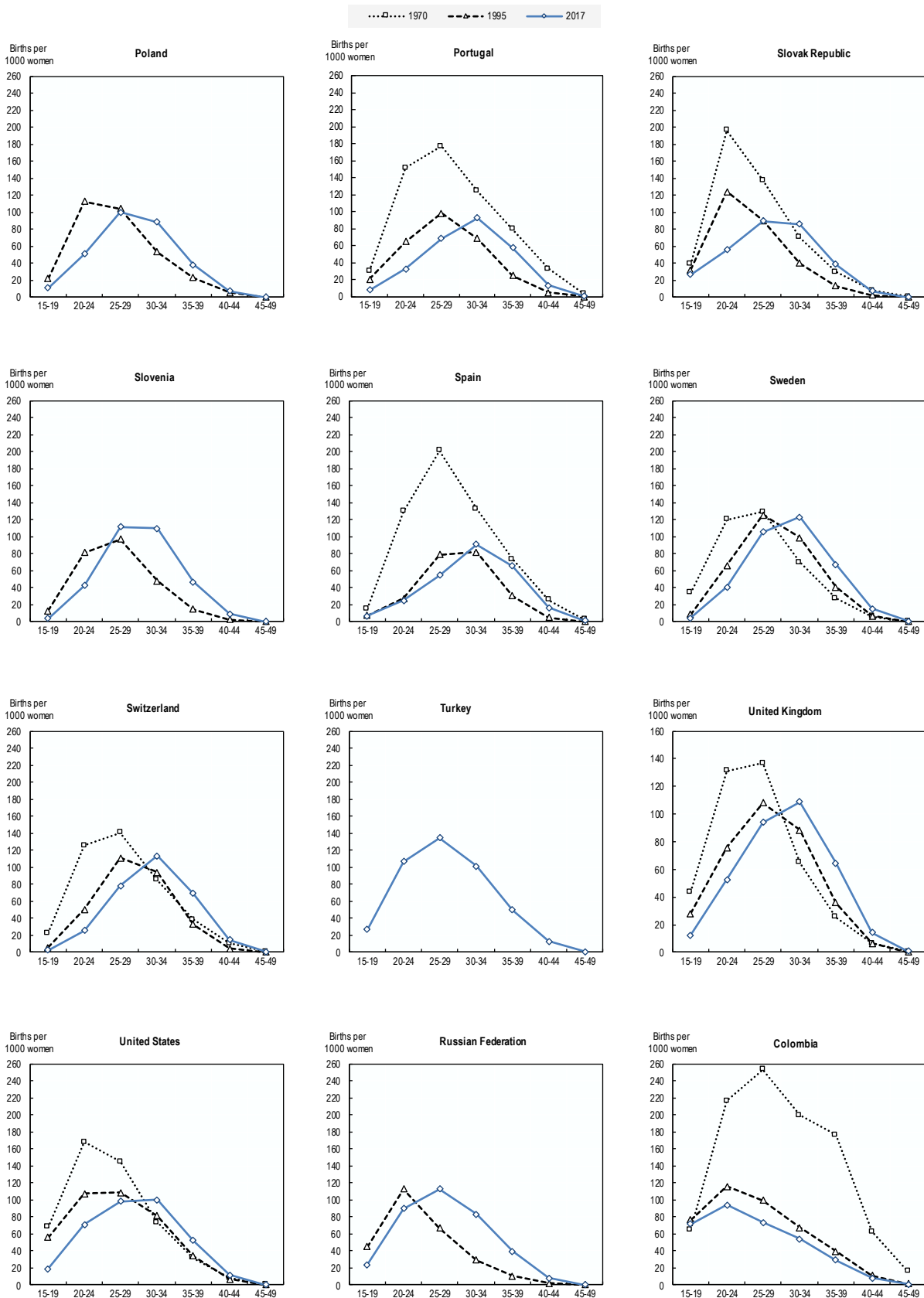
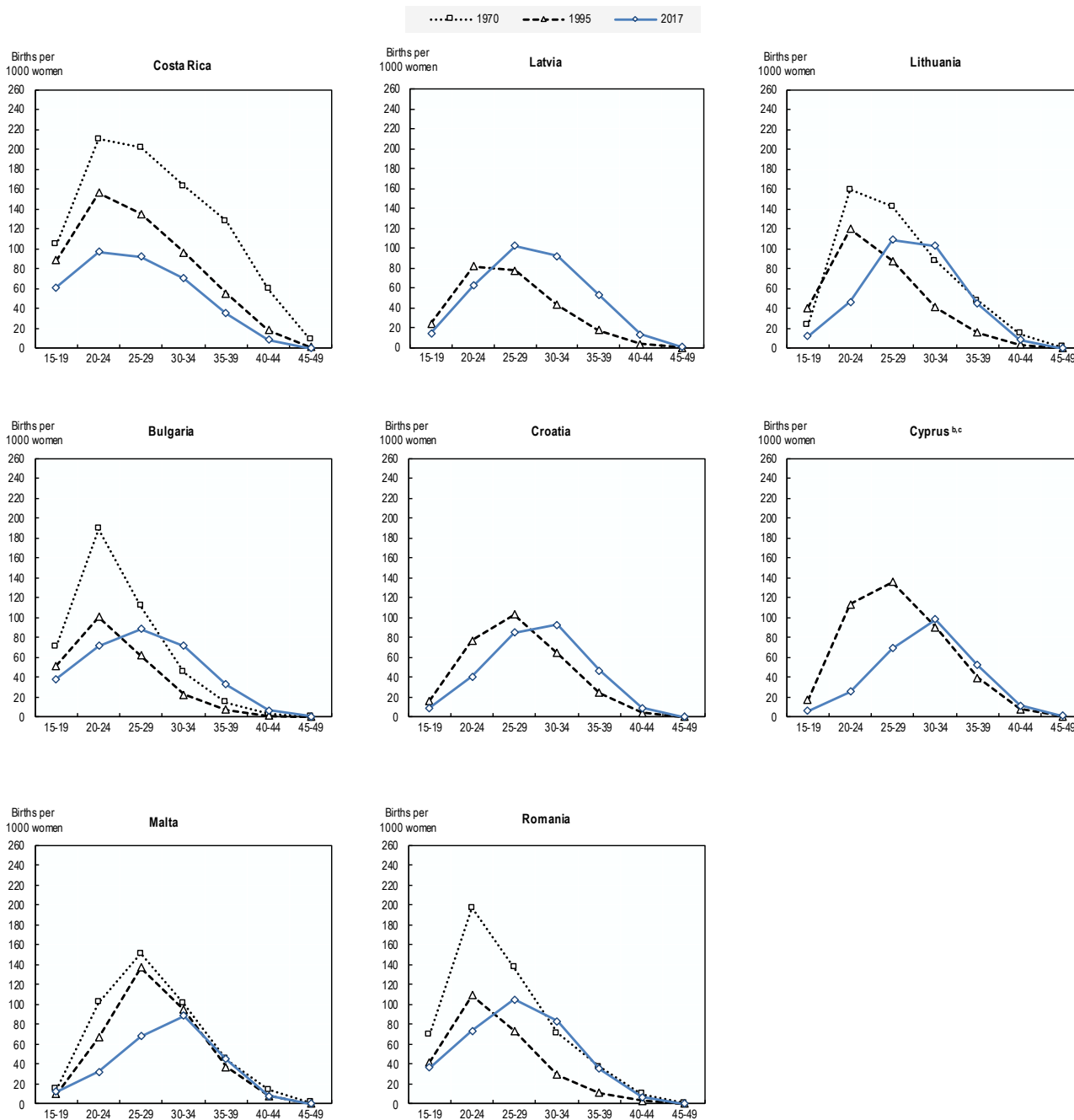


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2017 or latest available (cont.)
 Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group



Notes: For 1970, data for Colombia refer to 1969, for Spain refer to 1971, for the United Kingdom to 1973, for Romania to 1975 and for Malta to 1977. For 1995, data for Colombia and France refer to 1998, for Canada, Germany, Korea and Latvia to 2000, and for Croatia to 2001. Data for Chile, Mexico, Turkey, Colombia and Costa Rica to 2014, for Australia and the Russian Federation to 2015, and for Canada and New Zealand to 2016.

a) See note a) to Chart SF2.3.A

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

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

Sources: [for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics](#); [for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2017](#)