

Total fertility rates

Did you know?

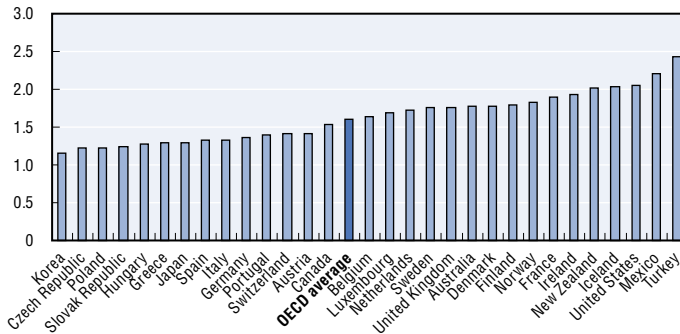
The *total fertility rate* is the number of children that are expected to be born to women of child-bearing age. A rate of about 2.1 will produce a stable population. Less than this, the population will decline unless the shortfall is made up by immigration.

Only two OECD countries have fertility rates above this level: Mexico and Turkey. The average fertility rate in OECD countries is now just 1.6.

In all OECD countries, fertility rates have declined for young women and increased at older ages, because women (and men) are postponing the age at which they start their families.

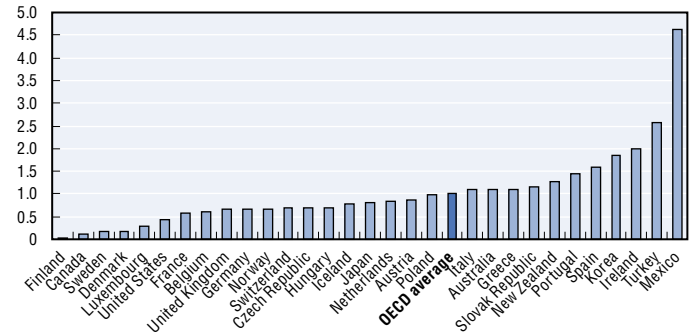
Many reasons have been given for the dramatic change in fertility rates. The most convincing is that young women, now better educated than those of earlier generations, wish to have a career as well as a family. The countries with the lowest fertility rates tend to be those with the highest female employment rates.

Total fertility rates: number of children expected to be born to women aged 15 to 49
2004 or latest year available



The chart below shows the long-term decline in total fertility rates. The countries which had the highest fertility rates in 1970 have, unsurprisingly, recorded the largest subsequent declines. Finland, Denmark and Sweden are among those countries which recorded the smallest declines: these are countries which have traditionally had family-friendly employment policies including generous maternity/paternity leave and widely available child-care facilities. Even here, their current rates are below the replacement threshold.

Decline in total fertility rates since 1970
Absolute difference between 1970 and 2004 fertility rates



Source: Council of Europe (2006), *Recent Demographic Developments in Europe, 2004*; Eurostat and national statistical offices.

Further reading:

OECD (2005), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD, Paris.
OECD (2002-2004), *Babies and Bosses – Reconciling Work and Family Life*, series, OECD, Paris.