

FERTILITY

The **total fertility rate (TFR)** gives an indication of the number of children an average woman will have in her lifetime. The size of the population remains stable if the total fertility rate is a little over two, allowing for some mortality during infancy and childhood. This so-called “replacement rate” is around 2.1 children per woman for industrialised countries but it may be higher for poorer countries.

Total fertility rates **vary considerably in the Asia/Pacific region** (Figure 3.4). In 2016, women in the region had on average 2.4 children compared with OECD countries at 1.7 children. Fertility rates in island countries such as Timor-Leste and Samoa are high with women having four children or more on average. By contrast, fertility rates are lowest in Korea and Singapore at around 1 child per woman. Armenia, China, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong (China) and Macau (China) all also have TFRs that are below the OECD average.

Birth rates have declined sharply over the last decades. The TFR average across the Asia/Pacific region fell by almost 3 children per woman from 1970 to 2016. OECD member countries in the region, with the exception of Korea, experienced a slower decline in the TFR at less than 1.5 children per woman on average. The Maldives recorded the largest decline in the TFR, from over seven children per woman in 1970 to 2.1 in 2016. No country had higher TFRs in 2016 than in 1970. Kazakhstan and Macau, China, are the two only economies which had higher TFRs in 2016 than in 1995.

Women in **poor economies** have much higher fertility rates than women in **wealthier economies** (Figure 3.5). In 2016, women in OECD and East Asian economies had the fewest children compared with the greater Asia/Pacific region. As more women gain higher educational attainment and pursue labour market careers, they tend to postpone having children and/or have less children altogether.

In countries where birth rates for **adolescent girls** are high – and where many young people are married

(see Marriage and divorce), overall fertility rates are also relatively high (Figure 3.6). Adolescent fertility rates are lowest in Korea and the Korea DPR. They remain high at around 60 births per 1 000 women aged 15-19 in Lao DPR; Nepal and the Philippines. They are highest in Bangladesh at 85 births per 1 000 women aged 15-19, almost three times the Asia/Pacific average (29 per 1 000) and over six times more than the OECD average (13 per 1 000).

Definition and measurement

The total fertility rate (TFR) in a specific year corresponds to the number of children that would be born to each woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and if the likelihood of her giving birth to children at each life stage followed the currently prevailing age-specific fertility rates. The adolescent birth rate is defined as the annual number of births per 1 000 women aged 15 to 19.

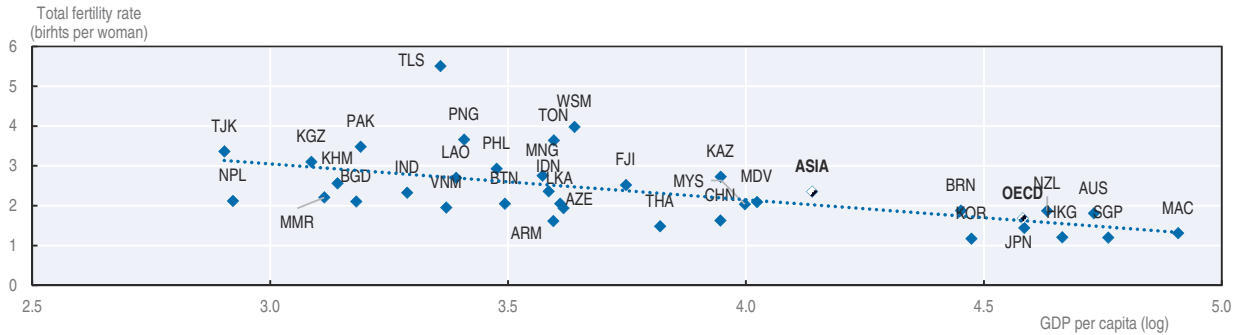
The data presented here are extracted from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators which for population data uses the United Nations Population Statistics as its key source (<http://esa.un.org/wpp>). These population statistics are based on administrative “vital registration” data, census data and/or survey data, and the quality of these sources is likely to vary across countries. For GDP per capita, see previous indicator “GDP per capita”.

Further reading

United Nations (2017), *World Fertility Data 2017 (POP/DB/Fert/Rev2017)*.

OECD (2018), “SF2 .1 Fertility rates”, *OECD Family Database*, <http://oe.cd/fdb>.

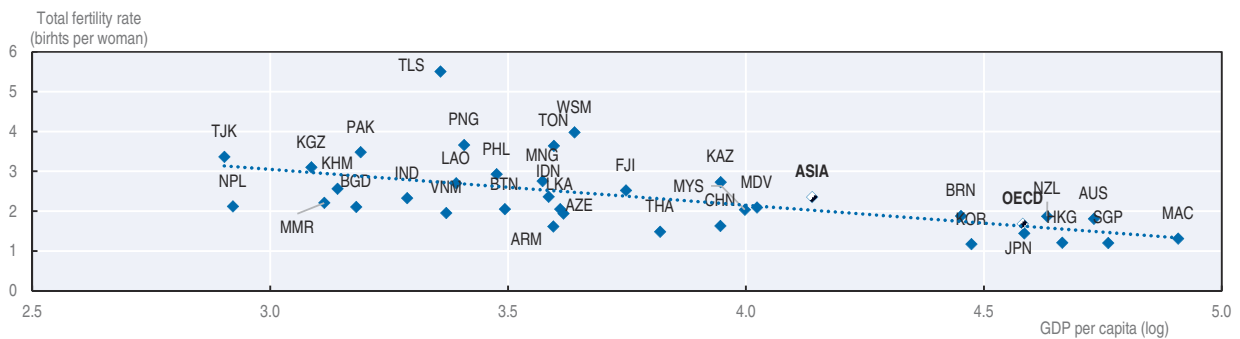
Figure 3.4. Despite rapid declines, fertility rates in Asia/Pacific are still higher than in OECD
 Number of children per woman aged 15 to 49, in 1970, 1995 and 2016 or nearest years



Source: World Bank, world Development Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933899793>

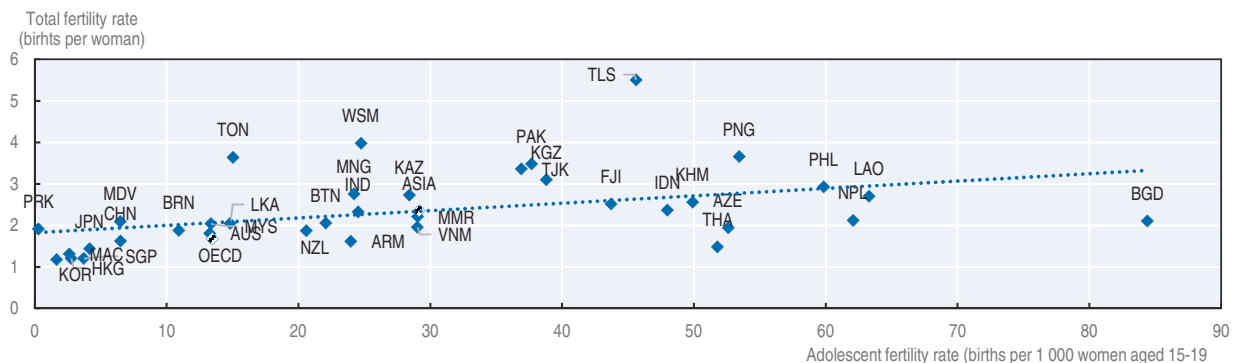
Figure 3.5. Richer countries have lower fertility rates



Source: World Bank, world Development Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933899812>

Figure 3.6. Countries with high fertility tend to also have high adolescent birth rates



Source: World Bank, world Development Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933899831>



From:
Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2019

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_aag-2019-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2019), "Fertility", in *Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/0c1f742c-en>

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