

## Fertility rates

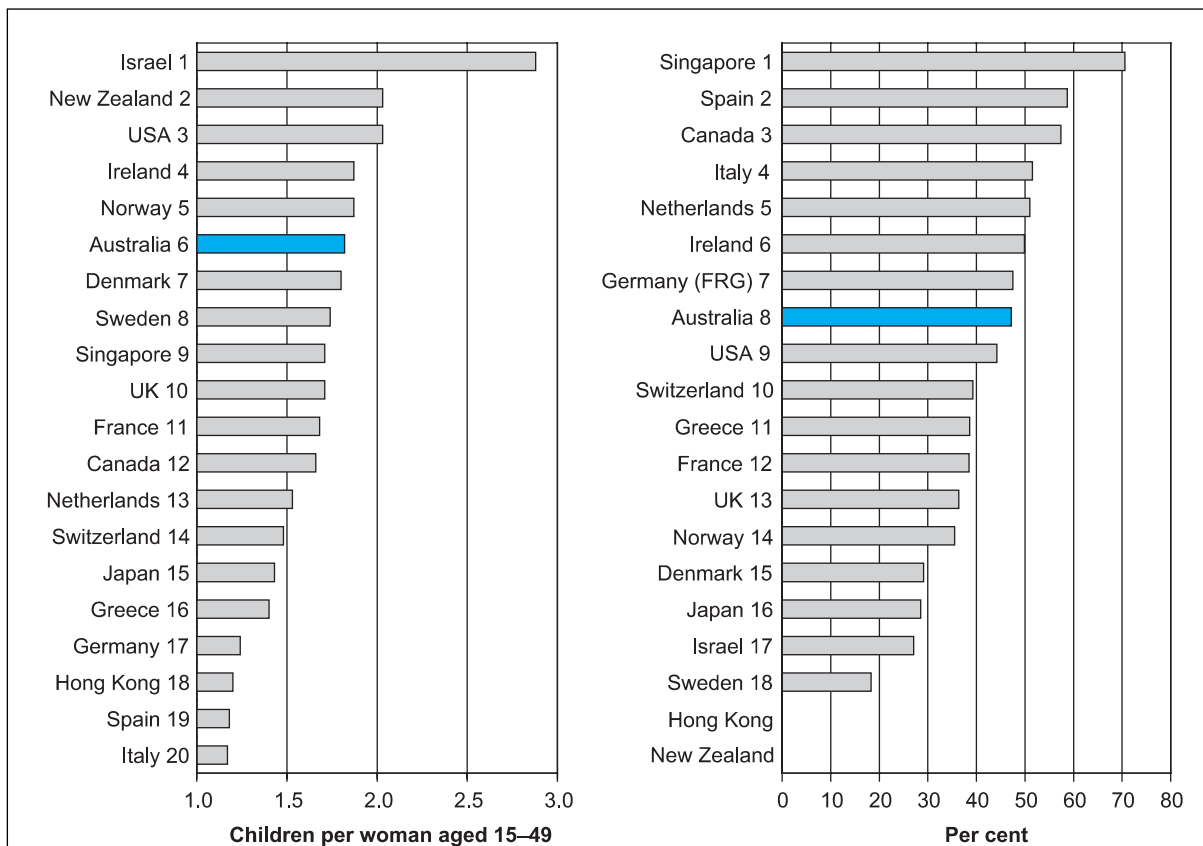


Figure 1: Total fertility rates, 1995

Figure 2: Declines in total fertility rates, 1960 to 1995

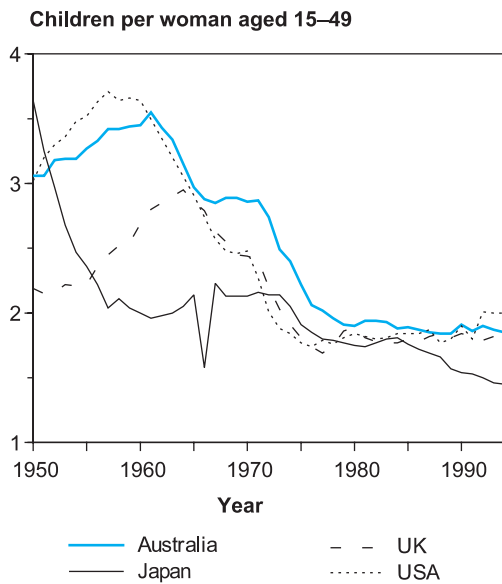


Figure 3: Trends in total fertility rates, 1950 to 1995

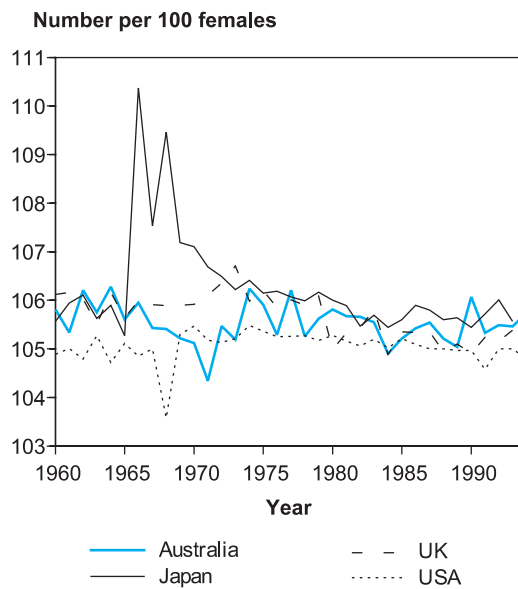


Figure 4: Trends in male:female ratios at birth, 1960 to 1995

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### Total fertility rate (children per woman aged 15–49)<sup>(a)</sup>

Country	1950	1960	1970	1980	1992	1993	1994	1995	% change 1960–1995
Australia	3.06	3.45	2.86	1.90	1.90	1.87	1.85	1.82	–47.2
Canada	3.37	3.90	2.33	1.68	1.71	1.70	1.68	1.66	–57.4
Denmark	2.58	2.54	1.95	1.55	1.76	1.75	1.81	1.80	–29.1
France	2.92	2.73	2.48	1.95	1.73	1.65	1.65	1.68	–38.5
Germany (FRG)	—	2.36	2.01	1.44	1.40	1.30	1.26	1.24	–47.5
Greece	—	2.28	2.34	2.23	1.40	1.35	1.38	1.40	–38.6
Hong Kong	—	—	3.29	2.06	1.26	1.23	1.22	1.20	—
Ireland	—	3.73	4.03	3.23	2.02	1.93	1.85	1.87	–49.9
Israel	—	3.95	3.91	3.09	2.93	2.92	2.90	2.88	–27.1
Italy	—	2.41	2.43	1.69	1.26	1.21	1.19	1.17	–51.5
Japan	3.64	2.00	2.13	1.75	1.50	1.46	1.45	1.43	–28.5
Netherlands	3.10	3.12	2.57	1.59	1.59	1.57	1.56	1.53	–51.0
New Zealand	—	—	3.17	2.03	2.12	2.10	2.04	2.03	—
Norway	2.53	2.90	2.50	1.72	1.88	1.86	1.87	1.87	–35.5
Singapore	—	5.81	3.09	1.82	1.76	1.78	1.75	1.71	–70.6
Spain	2.46	2.86	2.84	2.22	1.23	1.24	1.22	1.18	–58.7
Sweden	2.32	2.13	1.94	1.68	2.09	2.00	1.89	1.74	–18.3
Switzerland	2.40	2.44	2.10	1.55	1.58	1.51	1.49	1.48	–39.3
UK	2.19	2.69	2.44	1.89	1.79	1.82	1.75	1.71	–36.4
USA	3.02	3.64	2.48	1.84	2.01	2.00	2.00	2.03	–44.2

(a) The total fertility rate is the sum of the age-specific birth rates, and represents the number of children that would be born to a woman were she to experience the age-specific rates for the year shown.

Sources: OECD 1997; United Nations 1979, 1997.

- Unlike crude birth rate, the total fertility rate is a summary measure of fertility that is not affected by the age–sex composition of the population, thus allowing for international comparisons.
- Australia's total fertility rate is at its lowest level ever. In 1995, a woman in Australia would bear 1.82 children during her reproductive years. This rate, however, is still in the upper third for the 20 developed countries included here for comparison purposes. Apart from Israel, which in 1995 had a total fertility rate of 2.88, rates in all other countries were below the replacement level of 2.1 (Figure 1). This represents the average number of births per woman required to replace a population in the long-term, given prevailing mortality levels (ABS 1998a).
- Post-war fertility in Australia exhibits three distinct phases—a steady increase until the early 1960s (the 'baby boom'), a rapid decline until the early 1980s (with a temporary recovery in the late 1960s), and a levelling off since the early 1980s. Similar patterns are seen in the United States and United Kingdom, but not in Japan (Figure 3). Fertility in Japan fell rapidly until the early 1960s, and has continued to decline steadily since. The Japanese saw a sharp decline in births in 1966, due to this being a year of *hinoeuma*, a superstition which held that girls born in this year were unlucky. This led to an unequal ratio of male to female births (Ministry of Health and Welfare 1995). Normally there are about 5 to 6 per cent more male births than female births (Figure 4).
- Fertility has declined substantially in almost all developed countries, except Sweden, since 1950. Most of this decline occurred in the younger age groups, with childbirth increasingly being deferred to later ages. A number of other social and attitudinal changes have also contributed to this decline. These include the wider availability of contraceptives and the acceptance of a two-child family norm.
- Leaving aside the effects of immigration and mortality, declining fertility rates in some European countries imply sharply contracting populations by 2050.

#### For more information, see:

Australian Bureau of Statistics. Births, Australia. Cat. No. 3301.0. Canberra: ABS.  
 Australian Bureau of Statistics 1986. Australian demographic trends 1986. Cat. No. 3102.0. Canberra: ABS.