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World Fertility and Family Planning 2020

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Long-term population trends are driven largely by fertility. Since the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, the international community has committed to actions that guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, and the realization of reproductive rights for all people. Contraception assists couples and individuals to achieve their reproductive goals, enabling them to exercise the right to have children by choice.

*The following key findings are based on **World Fertility and Family Planning 2020: Highlights**, prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).*

Ten key messages

1. Although women are having fewer babies, fertility remains high in some regions

From 1990 to 2019, the global fertility rate fell from 3.2 to 2.5 live births per woman. Today, close to half of the world's population lives in a country where lifetime fertility is below 2.1 live births per woman.¹ The decline in fertility ranged from 1.9 births per woman in Central and Southern Asia to 0.1 births per woman in Australia and New Zealand, Europe and Northern America. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the highest fertility levels, the total fertility rate dropped from 6.3 to 4.6 births per woman. Fertility levels also fell in Oceania (from 4.5 to 3.4), Northern Africa and Western Asia (from 4.4 to 2.9), Latin America and the Caribbean (from 3.3 to 2.0), and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (from 2.5 to 1.8).

2. Fertility decline in sub-Saharan Africa is occurring later and at a slower pace

In 1950, the total fertility rate was above 6 live births per woman in Northern Africa and Western Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania² and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, it took 19 years for the total fertility rate to decline from 6 to 4 live births per woman (from 1974 to 1993) as compared to 24 years in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (from 1950 to 1974) and 35 years in Oceania² (from 1968 to 2003). In sub-Saharan Africa, it may take 34 years, from 1995 to 2029, for fertility to decline from 6 to 4 live births per woman.

3. Most countries that witnessed a sharp decline in fertility in recent years are in sub-Saharan Africa

Between 2010 and 2019, 7 of the 10 countries witnessing the largest reductions in the total fertility rate were found in sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2010, it is estimated that Afghanistan experienced the largest decline in fertility (-1.7 live births per woman), followed by Uganda (-1.3), Malawi (-1.2), Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Yemen (-1.0 each). In Kenya, Chad, Jordan and Somalia, the fertility rate fell by 0.9 live births per woman.

4. Fertility levels are projected to continue declining globally

The global fertility rate is expected to continue to fall from 2.5 live births per woman today to 2.2 in 2050 and further to 1.9 in 2100.³ It is projected that, in sub-Saharan Africa, the total fertility rate will fall from 4.6 live births per woman today to 3.1 in 2050 and further to 2.1 in 2100.

¹ For populations with low mortality to have a growth rate of zero in the long run, the number of live births per woman should be roughly 2.1.

² Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

³ According to the medium-variant projection of the 2019 revision of World Population Prospects (<https://population.un.org/wpp/>).

5. Today, almost half of all women of reproductive age are using some form of contraception

Globally, 49 per cent of all women in the reproductive age range (15-49 years) were using some form of contraception in 2019, compared to 42 per cent in 1990. Today, contraceptive use ranges from around 60 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Europe and Northern America, and Australia and New Zealand, to under 50 per cent in Central and Southern Asia (44.8%), Northern Africa and Western Asia (35.1%), sub-Saharan Africa (34.1%) and Oceania² (30.7%).

6. Among contraceptive users, the vast majority are using modern methods

The proportion of women of reproductive age using a modern method of contraception increased from 36 per cent in 1990 to 44 per cent in 2019. During the same period, the proportion of women using traditional methods of contraception fell from 6 to 4 per cent. In 2019, 91 per cent of all women of reproductive age using some form of contraception worldwide were using modern methods. Regions where less than 90 per cent of all women using contraception are using modern methods include sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia (88% each), Oceania² (82%) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (80%).

7. Contraceptive use and fertility are inversely correlated

In general, countries with high proportions of women using contraception have lower levels of fertility. Although this pattern has been observed both in 1990 and 2019, the relationship has changed over time. For instance, at every level of contraceptive use in 2019, countries of sub-Saharan Africa tend to experience higher levels of fertility compared to other regions.

8. The relationship between contraceptive use and fertility is influenced by many factors

The type of contraceptive methods used is an important determinant of fertility as some methods, including long-acting and permanent ones, are more effective at averting pregnancy than others. Other important determinants of the fertility level in a population include: the incidence of abortion, the duration of postpartum insusceptibility due to breastfeeding and sexual abstinence, the prevalence of secondary sterility and the proportion of the population that is married, in a union or sexually active.

9. Socioeconomic factors play an important role in determining fertility levels

To achieve further reductions in fertility, especially in countries where current fertility levels remain high, it is crucial to continue working towards gender equality and empowerment of women and by increasing the participation of men in family planning. Furthermore, countries should continue to promote female education, combat all forms of violence and discrimination against women, eliminate early, forced and child marriage, and ensure that women have equal access to the labour market, social protection and the political process.

10. Achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health by 2030 requires intensified support for family planning

In the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments committed to actions that guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning and the realization of reproductive rights for all people. To honour these commitments, it will be crucial to meet fully the demand for family planning by investing in and providing access to reproductive and health-care services for all.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These key messages are based on *World Fertility and Family Planning 2020: Highlights*, which provides a global overview of trends in fertility and family planning and reviews the status of implementation of the relevant internationally agreed goals and targets. More work of the Population Division is available at www.unpopulation.org.