

Government policies to raise or lower the fertility level

1. Fertility levels vary greatly across the world

Among the 201 countries or areas with at least 90,000 inhabitants in 2017, it is estimated that 83 had low levels of fertility, as the fertility of the population was below the level required for the long-term replacement of the population. On average, women in those countries bear fewer than 2.1 children over a lifetime (United Nations, 2017a). In addition, 96 countries or areas had intermediate levels of fertility, with women bearing between 2.1 and 5 children, while 22 were characterized by high levels of fertility, with women bearing more than 5 children. Of the countries or areas with high levels of fertility, 20 are in Africa and 2 in Asia.

2. Countries with higher levels of fertility are more likely to have policies to reduce fertility

Globally, 42 per cent of governments have adopted one or more policies to lower current levels of fertility. Policy measures to reduce fertility include: raising the minimum legal age at marriage; providing access to reproductive health care, including low cost, safe and effective contraception; integrating family planning and safe motherhood programmes into primary health care systems; and improving female education and employment opportunities.

Table 1. Policies to influence the level of fertility, by region (percentage of governments)

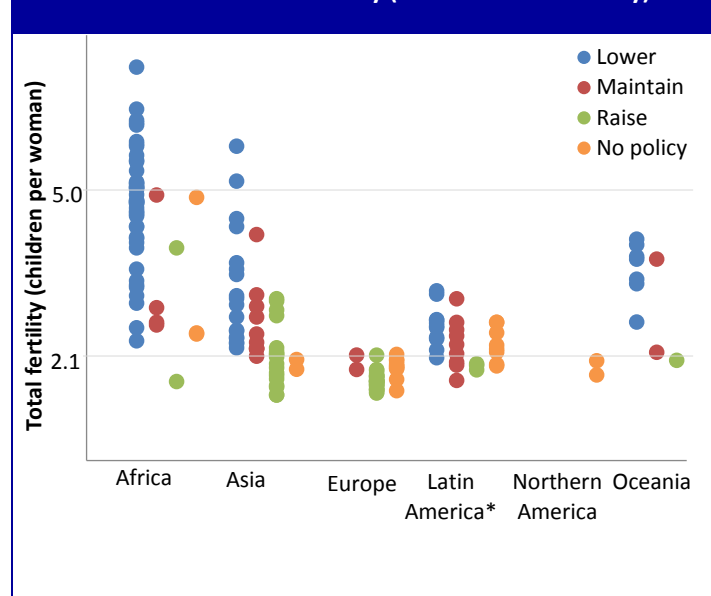
	Raise	Maintain	Lower	No intervention	Number of countries
World	28	15	42	15	197
Africa	4	7	83	6	54
Asia	38	21	38	4	48
Europe	66	9	0	25	44
Latin America*	9	27	33	30	33
Northern America	0	0	0	100	2
Oceania	19	19	56	6	16

Data source: United Nations (2016).
Notes: Based on 197 countries with available data. *Latin America refers to Latin America and the Caribbean.

All countries with high fertility and 64 per cent of those with intermediate fertility have policies to lower the fertility level of the population. Reducing fertility through appropriate policies can facilitate the achievement of the Goals and

targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially those related to poverty, nutrition, health, education and gender equality.

Figure 1. Fertility levels of countries, by region and policy orientation toward fertility (one dot = one country)



Data source: United Nations (2016, 2017a).
Notes: Based on 184 countries with available data. *Latin America refers to Latin America and the Caribbean.

3. Countries with fertility below the replacement level tend to have policies to increase fertility

Globally, 28 per cent of governments have adopted policies to raise the level of fertility. Europe (66 per cent) has the highest proportion of countries seeking to increase fertility, followed by Asia (38 per cent).

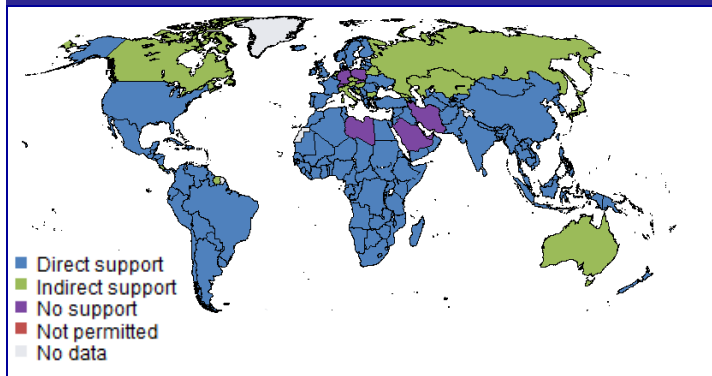
Among countries with fertility below the replacement level, 62 per cent have adopted policies to increase fertility. Specific measures include: baby bonuses; family allowances; maternal, paternal and parental leave; tax incentives; and flexible work schedules.

4. Most governments provide direct support for family planning

Globally, 84 per cent of governments provide direct support for family planning, meaning that family planning services

are provided through government-run facilities or outlets. Among other governments with available data, 9 per cent provide indirect support for family planning, meaning that the government does not provide family planning services through government outlets but instead supports private actors, including non-governmental organizations, in providing those services.

Figure 2. Type of government support for family planning, 2015



Data source: United Nations (2016).

Notes: (1) Based on 197 countries with available data. (2) The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Only 6 per cent of governments provide no support for family planning, while still allowing the legal provision of family planning services by the private sector. One sovereign state does not allow family planning programmes or services within its jurisdiction.

5. Gaps persist in access to family planning

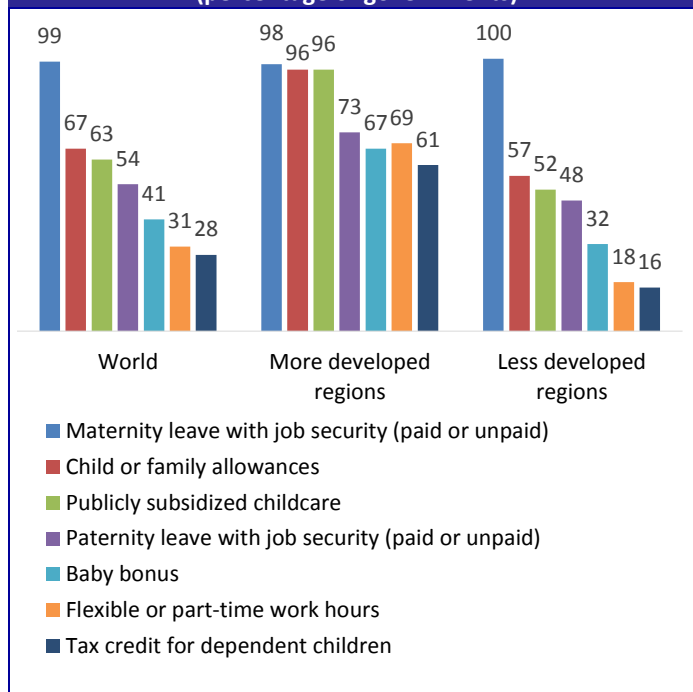
Although women's access to family planning has increased in recent decades, the United Nations (2017b) estimates that, globally, 12 per cent of women in the reproductive ages (15-49 years) who are married or in a marriage-like union have an unmet need for family planning, meaning that they express a desire to stop or delay childbearing but are not using any method of contraception. Including users of traditional contraceptive methods, it is estimated that 17 per cent of married or in-union women worldwide had a need for family planning that was not being met by modern methods of contraception in 2017.

Ninety-three per cent of governments in countries where the unmet need for family planning is 20 per cent or more have implemented policies to expand access to effective contraception in the five years prior to the survey, compared to 77 per cent of governments in countries where the unmet need for family planning is less than 10 per cent.

6. Many governments have instituted policies to influence the balance between work and family obligations

Globally, 99 per cent of countries have laws that guarantee maternity leave with job security, while 54 per cent of countries also guarantee paternity leave with job security. Sixty-seven per cent of governments provide child or family allowances, 63 per cent subsidize childcare, and 41 per cent pay a baby bonus to parents. In addition, 31 per cent of governments allow flexible hours or part-time work for working parents, and 28 per cent provide a tax credit to persons with dependent children. With the exception of maternity leave, these measures were more prevalent in 2015 within the more developed regions than in the less developed regions.

Figure 3. Policy measures concerning childbearing and child-rearing to improve work-family balance, 2015 (percentage of governments)



Data source: United Nations (2016).

Note: Based on 196 countries with available data.

SOURCES

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2016). *World Population Policies Database: 2015 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

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