

SF2.3: Age of mothers at childbirth and age-specific fertility

Definitions and methodology

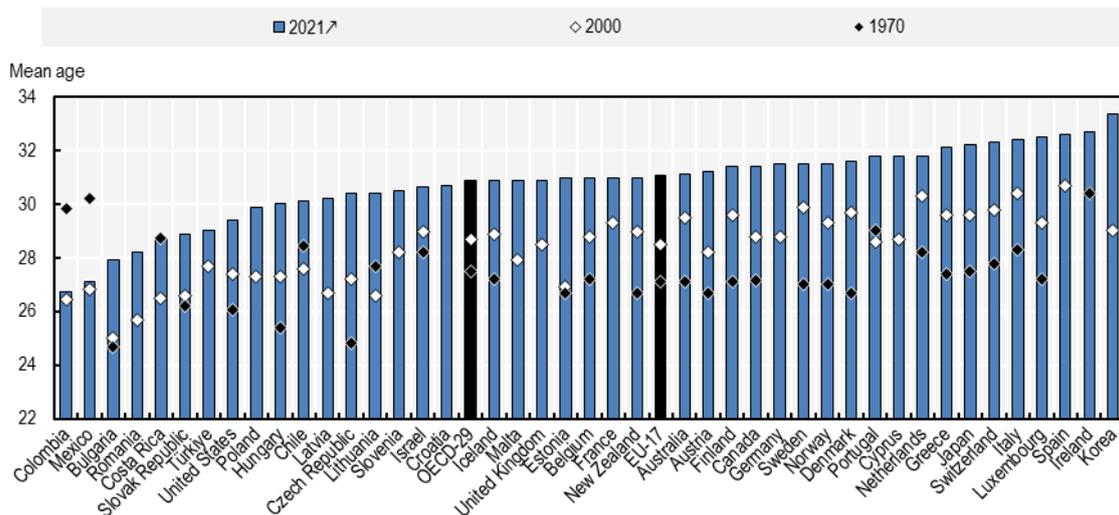
This indicator contains information on the age of mothers at childbirth and levels of fertility across age groups. It is based on two main measures:

- *Mean age of mothers at childbirth*, calculated as the simple mean average age in years of women at birth of their child in a given year. The mean age of mothers at childbirth is shown both for all childbirths and also for first births only.
- *Age-specific fertility rates*, calculated as the number of births per 1000 women of a given age in a given year. As a means of simplification, age-specific fertility rates are presented here per five-year age group and with particularly focus on fertility among adolescent (15-19 year old) women.

Key findings

In most OECD countries, the average age at which women give birth now stands at 30 or above (Chart SF2.3.A). Only in two Latin American OECD countries (Colombia and Mexico) is the mean age of women at childbirth below 28, and in only seven (Costa Rica, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Türkiye and the United States) is it between 28 and 30. In all other OECD countries, the average age of women at childbirth is at least 30, and in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland, the average age is above 32.

Chart SF2.3.A. Mean age of women at childbirth, 1970, 2000 and 2021 or latest available



Notes:

1. Data for the United Kingdom refer to England & Wales only.
2. For 2021, data for Chile and Türkiye refer to 2020; for 1970, data for Colombia refer to 1969.

Sources: For European countries and Türkiye, Eurostat Demographic Statistics: Fertility rates by age; for Australia, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Women who gave birth, by maternal age; for Canada, Statistics Canada: Mean age of mother at time of delivery (live) births; for Chile, calculations based on INE: Estadísticas Vitales; for Colombia, calculations based on DANE: Datos de nacimientos en Colombia; for Costa Rica, calculations based on INEC: Nacimientos; for Israel, CBS: Average Age of Mother at Birth and at First Birth; for Japan, Official Statistics of Japan: Vital Statistics – Natality; for Korea, KOSIS: Mean Age of Mother by Birth Order; for Mexico, calculations based on INEGI: Natalidad; for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand: Median age of mother; for the United Kingdom, ONS: Standardized mean age of mother by birth order; for the United States, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: National Vital Statistics Reports - Mean age of mother by live-birth order; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data.

Other relevant indicators: Family size and composition (SF1.1); Fertility rates (SF2.1); Share of births outside marriage (SF2.4); and Marriage and divorce rates (SF3.1).

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Note by Türkiye: The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Türkiye recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Türkiye shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”.

Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union: The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Türkiye. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

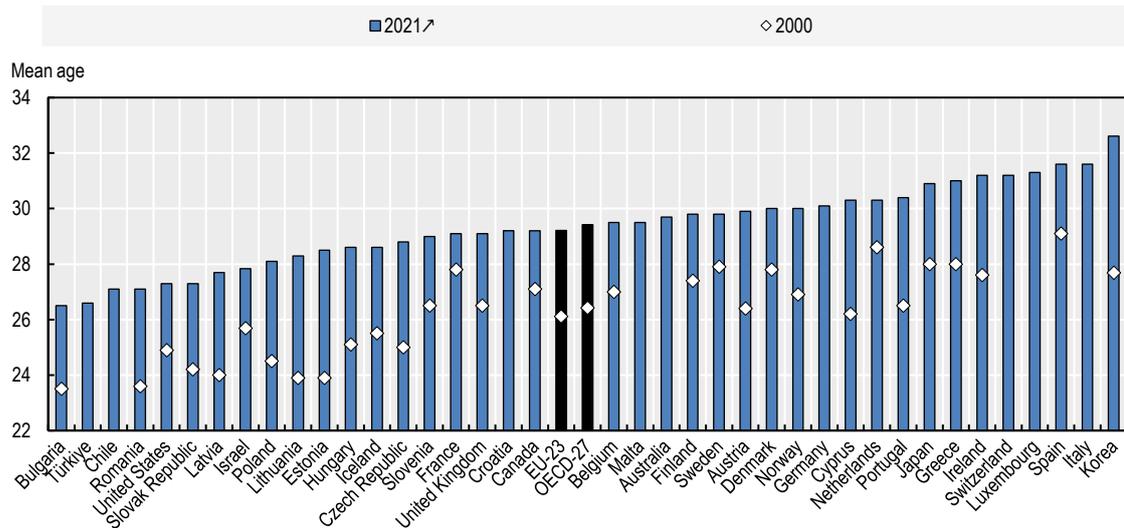
Updated: July 2023

Click [here](#) to download the data in Microsoft Excel Format

Most OECD countries have seen the average age of women at childbirth increase by between 2 and 5 years between 1970 and 2021, with the largest increase (5.6 years) recorded for the Czech Republic. However, two Latin American countries (Colombia and Mexico) experienced a downward trend, with the mean age of women at childbirth decreasing by over two years since 1970.

Increases in the mean age of women at childbirth are driven at least in part by a trend towards postponement of the first birth (Chart SF2.3.B). Current mean ages at first birth vary considerably across OECD countries – in Türkiye, for example, the average age at which women give birth to a first child is 26.6, whereas in Korea it is as high as 32.6. All OECD countries with available data have seen the mean age at first birth increase since 2000, with most recording an increase of at least 2 years. In Estonia, Korea and Lithuania, it has risen by over 4 years.

Chart SF2.3.B. Mean age of women at the birth of their first child, 2000 and 2021 or latest available



Notes:

1. For 2021, data for Türkiye and the United Kingdom refer to 2020, Chile refer to 2019; for Canada to 2016.
2. Data for the United Kingdom refer to England & Wales only

Sources: For European countries and Türkiye, Eurostat Demographic Statistics: Mean age of women at childbirth and at birth of first child; for Australia, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Women who gave birth, by maternal age; for Canada, Statistics Canada: Mean age of mother at time of delivery (live) births; for Chile, calculations based on INE: Estadísticas Vitales; for Israel, CBS: Average Age of Mother at Birth and at First Birth; for Japan, Official Statistics of Japan: Vital Statistics – Natality; for Korea, KOSIS: Mean Age of Mother by Birth Order; for the United Kingdom, ONS: Standardized mean age of mother by birth order; for the United States, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: National Vital Statistics Reports - Mean age of mother by live-birth order.

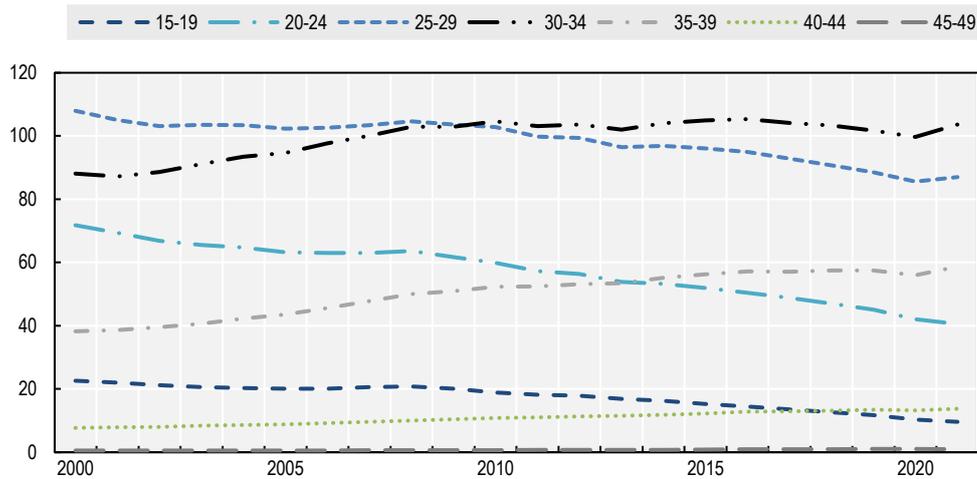
The postponement of family formation is reflected in age-specific fertility trends. Since 2000, fertility rates have been declining for women under 30 years old whereas they have been rising for those aged 30 years and older (Chart SF2.3.C). In the last few years, the average OECD fertility rate of 30-34s exceeded the fertility rate of 25-29s, so did the rate of 35-39s compared to 20-24s. The average 40-44s fertility rate also surpassed the adolescent fertility rate. Rising female education and employment, a delayed entry in the labour market, growing housing problems and in some cases insufficient support for families juggling work and children, have all played a role in declining fertility.

The shift towards postponement of the first birth is also reflected in trends in adolescent fertility rates (Chart SF2.3.D). On average across OECD countries with available data, current fertility rates for women aged 15-19 stand at 8.7 births per 1000 women. All OECD countries have seen adolescent fertility fall over the past few decades, sometimes by as much as 50 or more births per 1000 women aged 15-19 (e.g. Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Iceland, New Zealand and the United States). However, adolescent fertility rates remain high in some OECD countries. In Colombia and Mexico, it is at around 50 births per 1000 women aged 15-19 – over five times higher than the OECD average.

The effects of the delay in childbearing are best illustrated by looking at shifts in fertility across age groups. Chart SF2.3.E shows, by country, age-specific fertility rates by five-year age groups for the years 1970, 1995 and 2021. In almost all OECD countries, fertility rates among 20-24 year-olds and 25-29 year-olds are much lower today than they were in 1970. Much of the decline in fertility among women aged 20-29 occurred between 1970 and 1995, but in many countries fertility rates for women in their 20s have continued to fall since 1995. Broadly though, Chart SF2.3.E shows that in addition to a general decline in fertility (see indicator SF2.1. Fertility rates), many OECD countries have seen the focus of childbearing shift to later age groups.

Chart SF2.3.C. Average OECD fertility rate by mother's age at childbirth

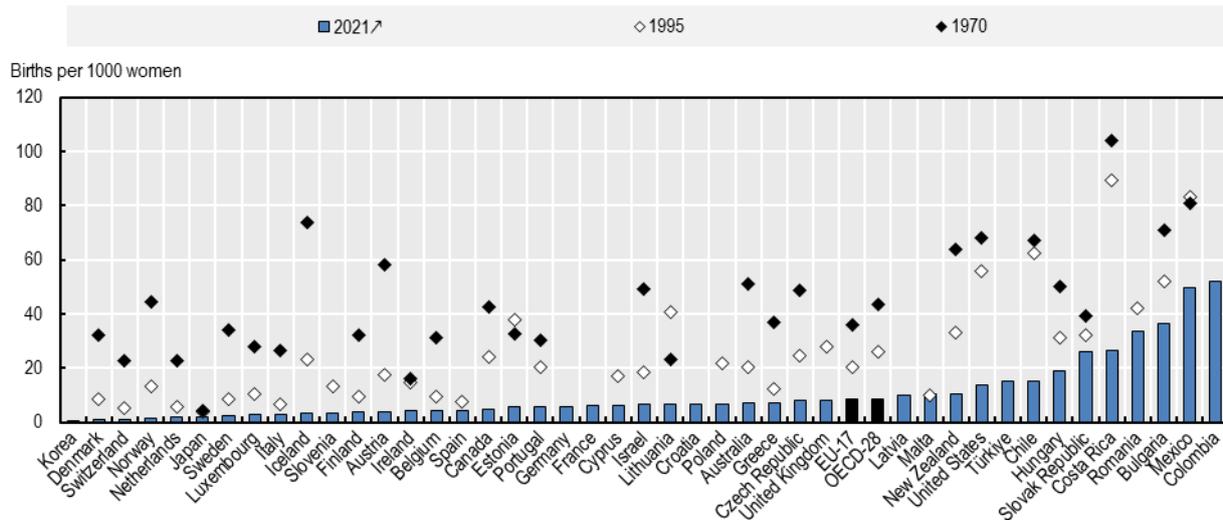
Births per 1000 women, five-year age groups, average of 38 OECD countries for 2000-2021



Sources: For European countries and Türkiye, Eurostat Demographic Statistics: Fertility rates by age; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics: Births, Australia; for Canada, Statistics Canada: Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility (live births); for Chile, calculations based on INE: Estadísticas Vitales; for Colombia, calculations based on DANE: Datos de nacimientos en Colombia; for Costa Rica, calculations based on INEC: Nacimientos; for Israel, calculations based on CBS: Vital Statistics - Live Births; for Japan, Official Statistics of Japan: Vital Statistics – Natality; for Korea, KOSIS: Total Fertility Rates and Age-Specific Rates; for Mexico, calculations based on INEGI: Natalidad; for New Zealand, Stats NZ: Age-specific fertility rates by 5 year age group; for the United Kingdom, ONS: Age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rates; for the United States, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: National Vital Statistics Reports - Births: Final Data; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data.

Chart SF2.3.D. Adolescent fertility rate, 1970, 1995 and 2021 or latest available

Births per 1000 women, 15-19 year olds



Sources: For European countries and Türkiye, Eurostat Demographic Statistics: Fertility rates by age; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics: Births, Australia; for Canada, Statistics Canada: Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility (live births); for Chile, calculations based on INE: Estadísticas Vitales; for Colombia, calculations based on DANE: Datos de nacimientos en Colombia; for Costa Rica, calculations based on INEC: Nacimientos; for Israel, calculations based on CBS: Vital Statistics - Live Births; for Japan, Official Statistics of Japan: Vital Statistics – Natality; for Korea, KOSIS: Total Fertility Rates and Age-Specific Rates; for Mexico, calculations based on INEGI: Natalidad; for New Zealand, Stats NZ: Age-specific fertility rates by 5 year age group; for the United Kingdom, ONS: Age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rates; for the United States, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: National Vital Statistics Reports - Births: Final Data; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data 2019.

Comparability and data issues

The disaggregation of fertility rates by mother's age is useful as a means of identifying changes in the timing of fertility which, amongst other things, affect trends in the total fertility rate (SF2.1). The age profiles above show that women are postponing childbearing with fertility declining at younger ages and increasing at older ages. The consequences of these changes in timing on overall levels of fertility are not always exactly clear but postponement of childbirth is likely to lead to the underestimation of fertility as measured by the total fertility rate.

Sources and further reading:

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Comolli, C. et al. (2021), "Beyond the Economic Gaze: Childbearing During and After Recessions in the Nordic Countries", *European Journal of Population* 37, pp. 473-520, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-020-09570-0>;

OECD (2019), [Rejuvenating Korea: Policies for a Changing Society](#).

OECD (2011), *Doing Better for Families*;

Vignoli, D. et al. (2021), "Economic Uncertainty and Fertility Intentions: The Causal Effect of Narratives of the Future", DISIA WORKING PAPER 5, [https://doi.org/Economic Uncertainty and Fertility Intentions: The Causal Effect of Narratives of the Future](https://doi.org/Economic%20Uncertainty%20and%20Fertility%20Intentions%3A%20The%20Causal%20Effect%20of%20Narratives%20of%20the%20Future);

Vignoli, D., V. Tocchioni and A. Mattei (2020), "The impact of job uncertainty on first-birth postponement", *https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2019.100308*, Vol. 45/September 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2019.100308>.

Chart SF2.3.E. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2021 or latest available

Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

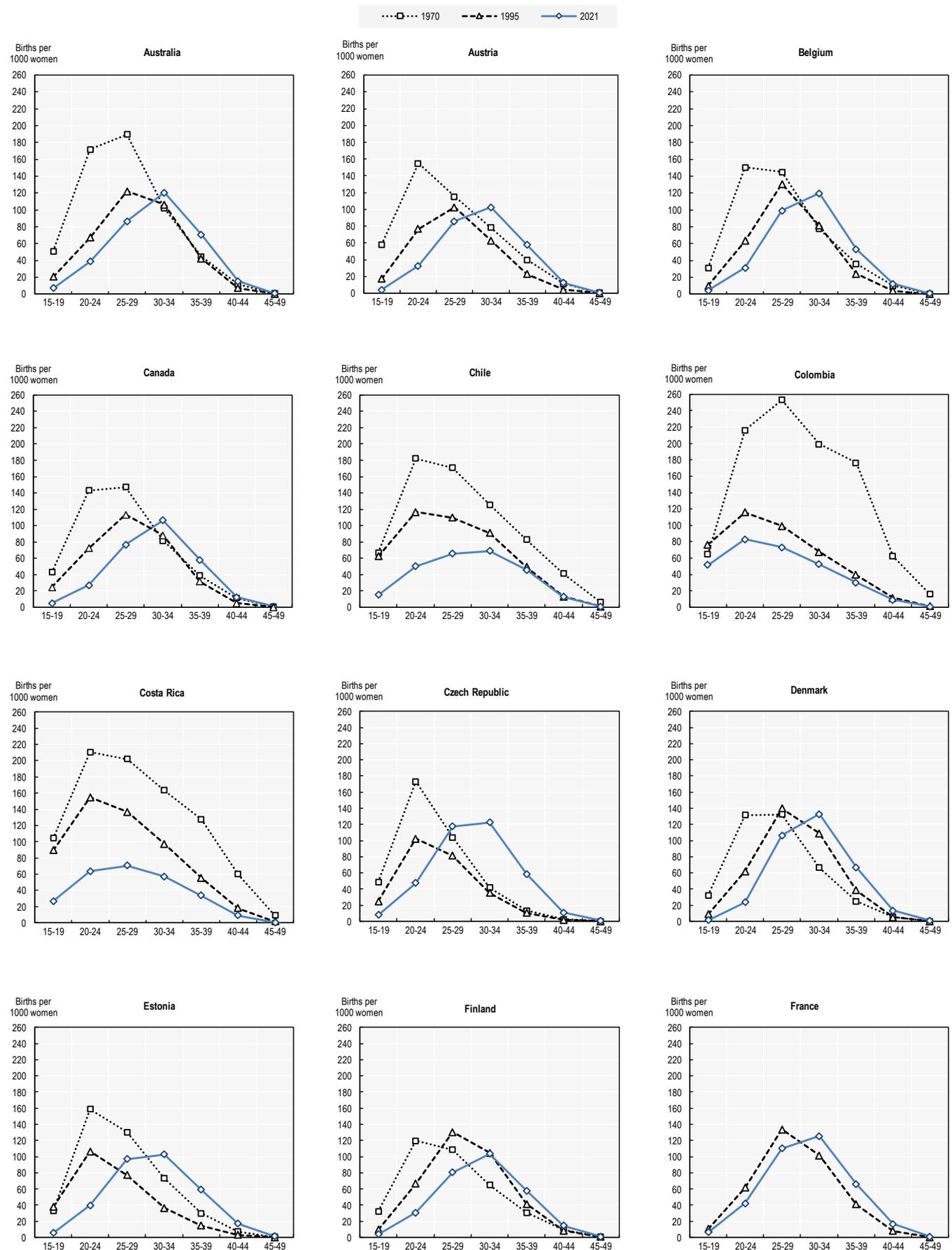


Chart SF2.3.E. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2021 or latest available (cont.)

Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

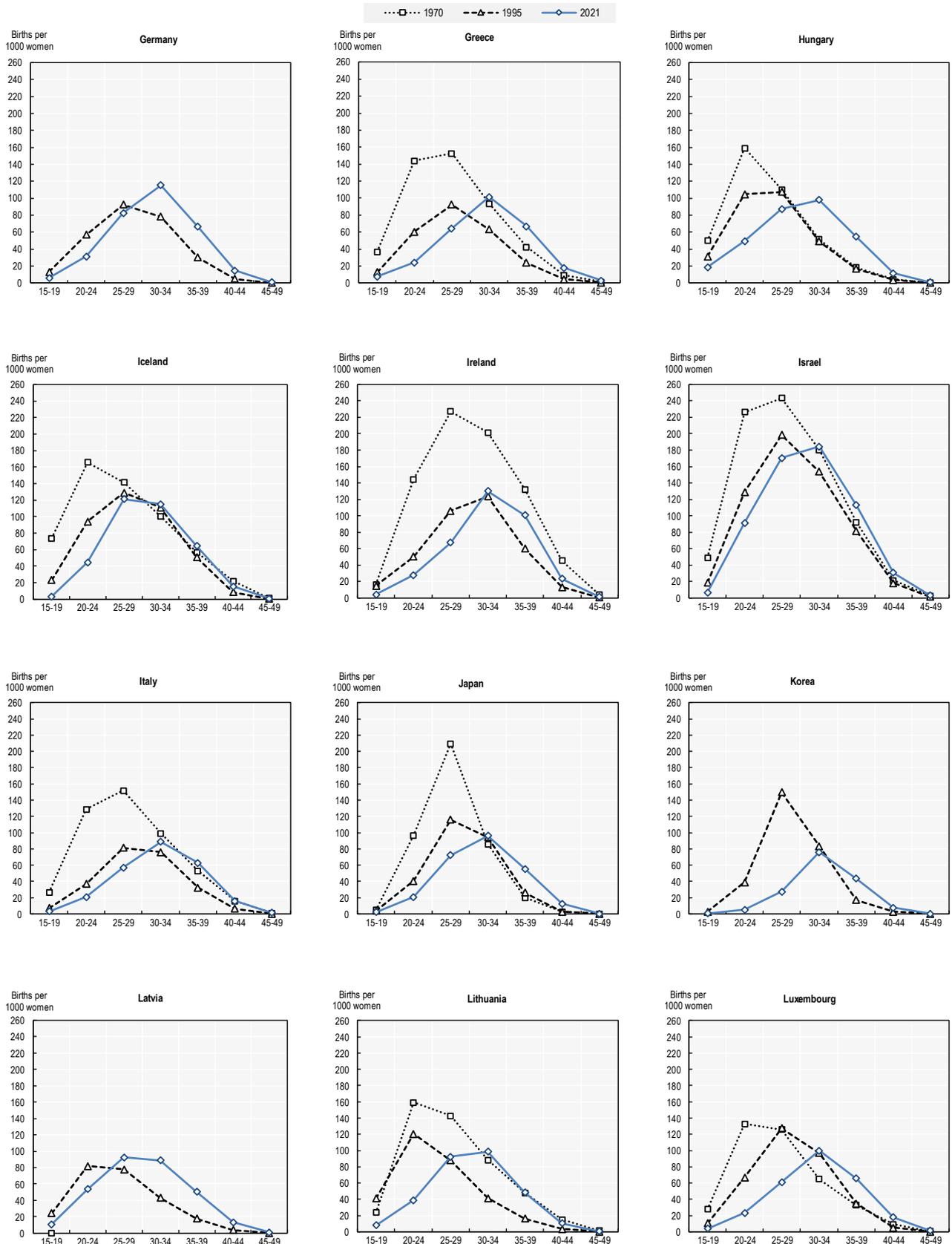


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2021 or latest available (cont.2)

Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group

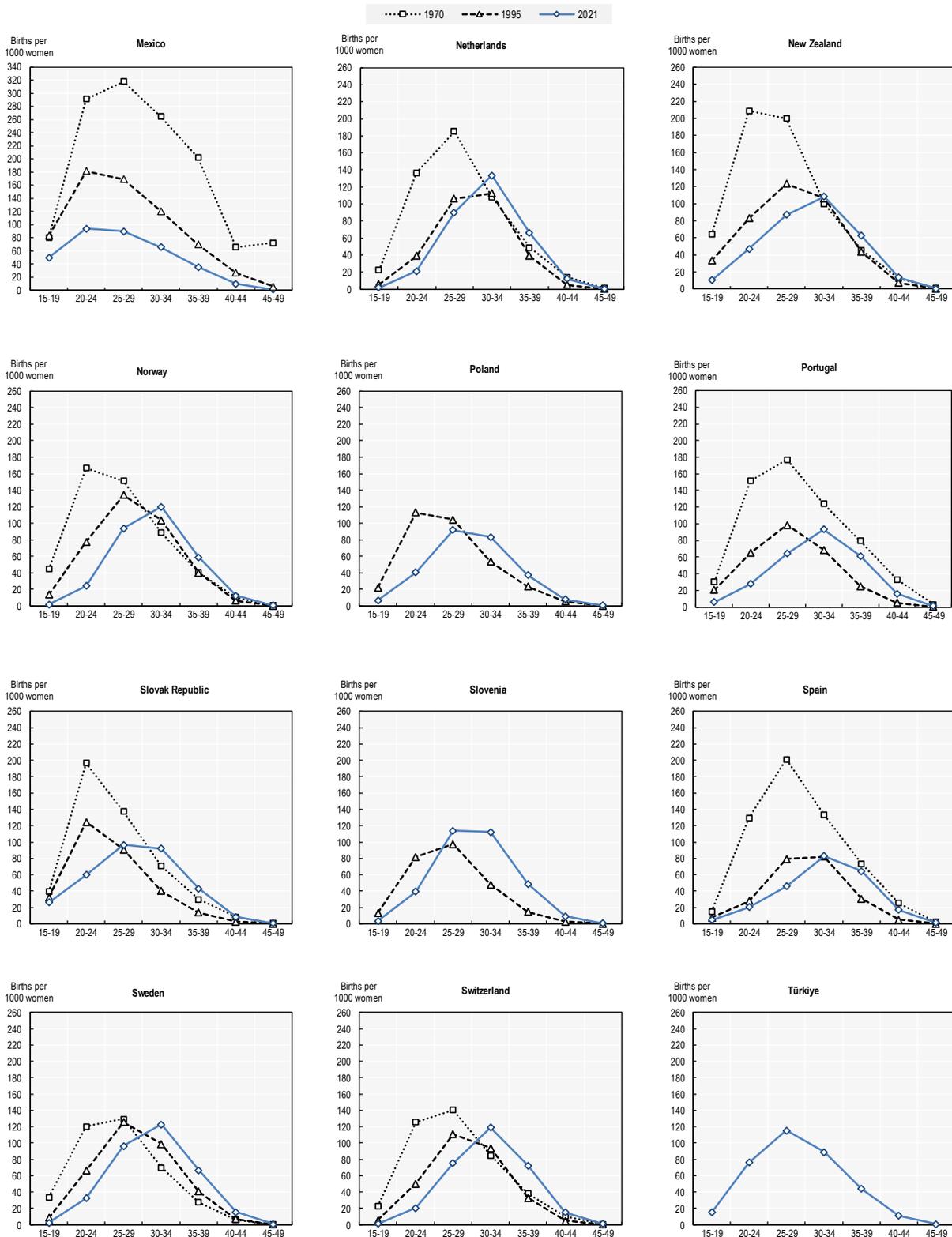
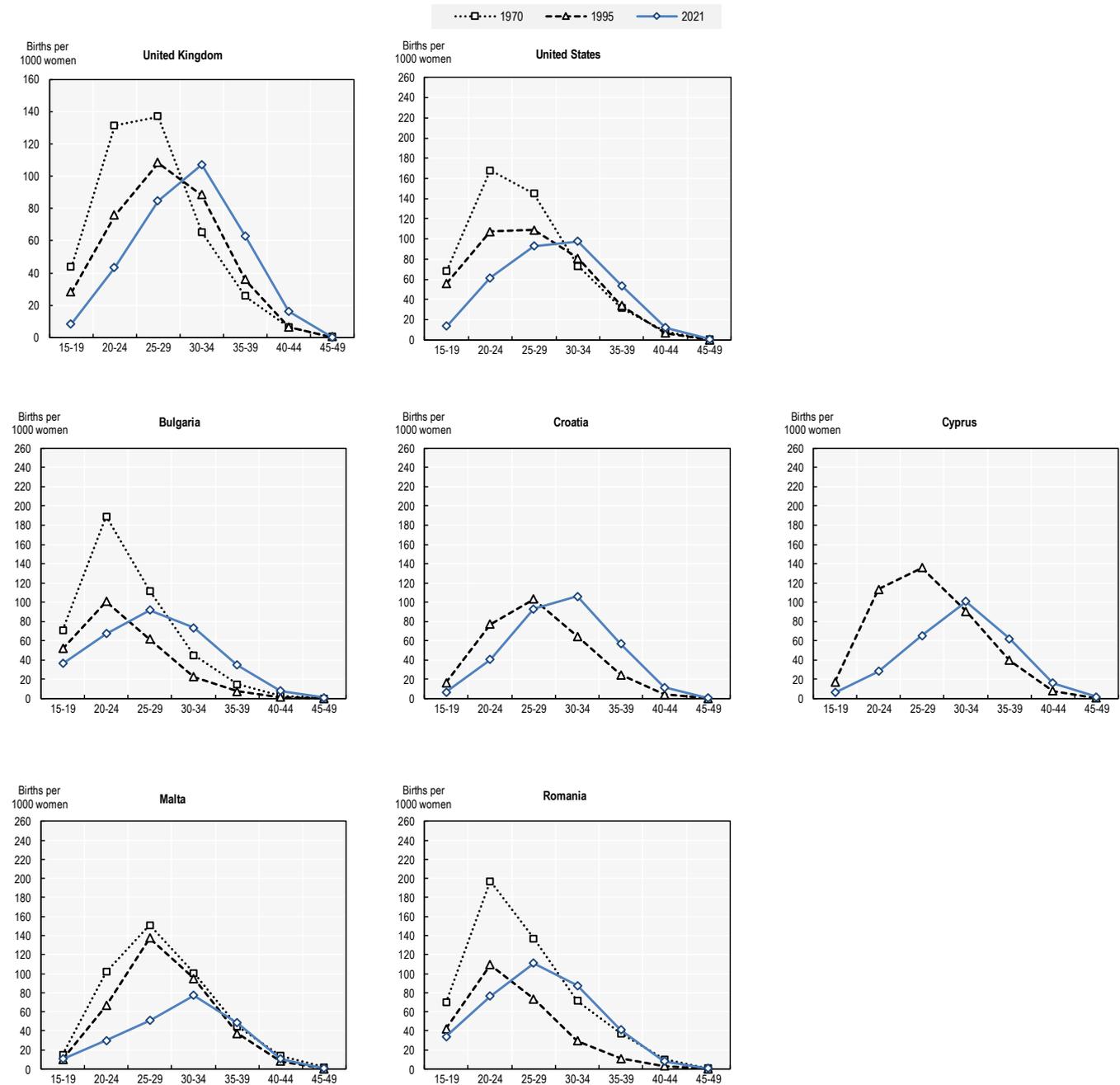


Chart SF2.3.D. Age-fertility profiles, 1970, 1995 and 2021 or latest available (cont.3)

Fertility rates (births per 1000 women) by five-year age group



Note:
 1. For 1970, data for Colombia refer to 1969, for Spain refer to 1971, for the United Kingdom to 1973, for Romania to 1975 and for Malta to 1977. For 1995, data for Colombia and France refer to 1998, for Germany, Korea and Latvia to 2000, and for Croatia to 2001. For 2021, data for Chile and Türkiye refer to 2020.
 Sources: For European countries and Türkiye, Eurostat Demographic Statistics: Fertility rates by age; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics: Births, Australia; for Canada, Statistics Canada: Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility (live births); for Chile, calculations based on INE: Estadísticas Vitales; for Colombia, calculations based on DANE: Datos de nacimientos en Colombia; for Costa Rica, calculations based on INEC: Nacimientos; for Israel, calculations based on CBS: Vital Statistics - Live Births; for Japan, Official Statistics of Japan: Vital Statistics - Natality; for Korea, KOSIS: Total Fertility Rates and Age-Specific Rates; for Mexico, calculations based on INEGI: Natalidad; for New Zealand, Stats NZ: Age-specific fertility rates by 5 year age group; for the United Kingdom, ONS: Age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rates; for the United States, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: National Vital Statistics Reports - Births: Final Data; for all other countries, United Nations World Fertility Data.