

Finland: mean age at birth of first child by sex; total fertility rates; living arrangements for children



Key points

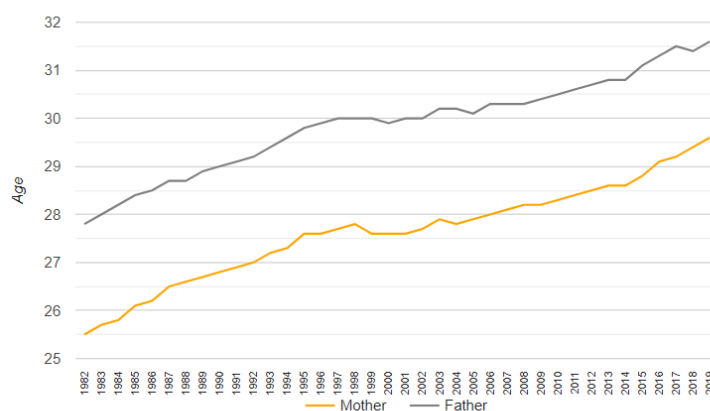
- The total fertility rate in Finland has declined since 2010, from 1.87 children per woman in 2010 to 1.35 children per woman in 2019, the lowest historically recorded rate.
- A growing proportion of Finnish women and men aged 15–49 live alone without a spouse, and this has contributed significantly to the postponement, or prevention, of childbearing: the proportion of women aged 28–32 living without a spouse was 20% in 2019, compared to 14% in 1999. The corresponding proportion of men aged 30–34 was 28% in 2019 compared to 20% in 1999.
- In 2019, first-time mothers in Finland were 2 years older, on average, than first-time mothers in 2000; first-time fathers were also older than the average age 20 years ago: the age difference between parents has remained at around 2 years over the last decades.
- A married couple with children is the most common family model in Finland, representing 57% of all families in 2019. Nevertheless, the number and proportion of one-parent families is on the rise. Lone-mother families represented 17% of families with children in 2000 and 20% in 2019; lone-father families represented 2% of families with children in 2000 and 3% in 2019.
- The average age of mothers at the birth of their first child has increased.

Current situation

Over the course of the last few decades, women's average age at the beginning of childbearing has increased. In 2019, first-time mothers in Finland were older than had previously been the case: the average age of first-time mothers in 2019 was 29.6 years, compared to 27.6 in 2000 (see figure I). This is connected to decreasing female fertility rates for the birth of the first child among women under age 30, coupled with increasing rates of fertility in older age groups.

On average, men are two years older than women when they become parents for the first time. In 2019, men became fathers for the first time at age of 31.6. Like mothers, first-time fathers were older than in previous decades: the difference in the ages of first-time mothers and first-time fathers has remained at around two years over the last decades.

Figure I: Mean age at first birth for first-time mothers and fathers: 1985–2019

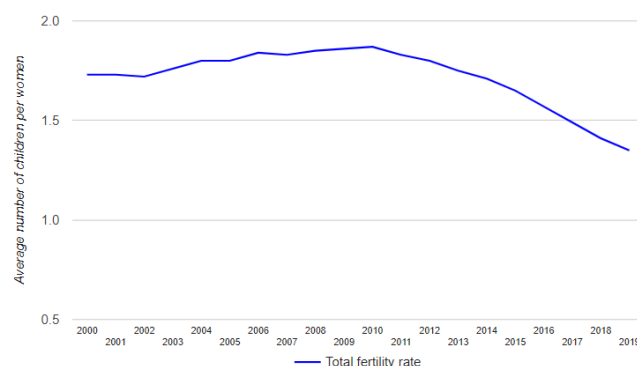


Source: Statistics Finland, Birth rate (https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/perheet/syntyvyys_en.html).

Total fertility rate has been declining since around 2010

In Finland, the total fertility rate has declined remarkably since 2010, when it was 1.87 children per woman — by 2019 the fertility rate was at an all-time low, at 1.35 children per woman. Compared to the rate in 2000, the birth rate fell in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (see figure II). The decline has been connected to the postponement of childbearing to older ages. As reported above, in 2019 the mean age of women giving birth for the first time was 29.6 years, and for first-time fathers the mean age was 31.6 years.

Figure II: Total fertility rate: 2000—2019



Source: Statistics Finland, Birth rate (https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/perheet/syntyvyyys_en.html).

The mean age at first birth is increasing - why?

Since the 1970s, on average, women have been giving birth to their first child at later ages than previously recorded — this during a period of time when women's participation in education and the labour force has continued to grow exponentially. In the Family Barometer 2017,¹ women, unlike men, expressed concern over career breaks caused by combining childbearing and employment, possibly because having children was considered either undesirable or inappropriate in the work environment, in particular for women in fixed-term employment.² To address this situation, women have adopted different ways of working, including part-time work, in order to schedule family leave: the demands of fixed-term employment on women have been a contributing factor in the decision to postpone childbearing.³

Traditional obligations for women, such as childcare and other family responsibilities, on the one hand and the demands of working life and career on the other have been perceived as contradictory and difficult to coordinate. In general, employers have not been expected to anticipate the situation of women of reproductive age, and jobs that were family-friendly were rare and sought after. For men, having children has not been seen as a reason for absence from work nor for adding childcare to their responsibilities in the home.⁴

It has also been suggested that the upswing in the number of small families and delayed childbearing are evidence of new kinds of problems and challenges, including difficulties in conceiving children and unwanted childlessness.⁵ In addition, a growing proportion of Finnish women of childbearing age live alone, without a spouse, as do a growing number of men in the same age bracket, and this has contributed significantly to the trend towards postponing, or preventing, childbearing. For example, in 2019, 20% of women aged 28—32 and 28% of men aged 30—34 lived alone without a spouse, compared to 14% of women and 20% of men in 1999.

Living arrangements for children aged 18 and below

Married couples with children are the most common family model in Finland, representing 57% of all families with children in 2019. Although there has been a steady decline over the years in this type of family, both in absolute and relative terms, other types of families with children are still far less prevalent.

In 2019, **one-parent families** represented almost one-fourth (23%) of all families with children. Families of mothers and children represented about 20% of all families with children. Even though the number of families with a single father and children has

grown, the number is still very low, and such families make up only 3% of all families with children. Nevertheless, the overall number and the share of one-parent families is on the rise. In 2000, 17% of families with children were composed of mothers and children and 2% were composed of fathers with children.

Source

- [Statistics Finland, Families with underage children by type in 1950–2019 \(corrected on 24 August 2020\)](#)

About the data

Definitions

- **Mean age at first birth:** Refers to the mean age of parents when having their first child: having children refers to biological children not to adopted or foster children.
- **Total fertility rate:** Mean (average) number of children a woman would have by age 50 if she survived to age 50 and was subject, throughout her life, to the age-specific fertility rates observed in a given year. The total fertility rate is expressed as the number of children per woman aged 15–49.⁶
- **Living arrangements⁷ of children from birth to age 17:** Refers to the place of residence where the children are registered: the information does not necessarily describe the everyday practices of families.⁸

Coverage

Women of childbearing age (conventionally ages 15–49) in Finland. Living arrangements for children cover children from birth to age 17. Analysis is at the national and subnational level.

Availability

Information on the mean age at first birth by sex is based on the Finnish Population Register.⁹ The main source for producing Finnish population statistics is the Population Information System, which is maintained by the Digital and Population Data Services Agency. Data on fathers are based on population data in the statistical reference period, according to which the names of fathers have been recorded for nearly 98% of children in the Population Information System.

Footnotes

1. Family Barometer (Perhebarometri).
2. Rotkirch, A., Tammisalo, K., Miettinen, A. and Berg, V., "Miksi vanhemmuutta lykötään? Nuorten aikuisten näkemyksiä lastensaannista", Perhebarometri (Family Barometer), University of Helsinki, 2017.
3. Sutela, H., "Määräaikainen työ ja perheellistyminen Suomessa 1984–2008", Tutkimuksia 259, Statistics Finland, Helsinki, 2013.
4. Rotkirch, A., Tammisalo, K., Miettinen, A. and Berg, V., "Miksi vanhemmuutta lykötään? Nuorten aikuisten näkemyksiä lastensaannista", Perhebarometri, University of Helsinki, 2017.
5. Klemetti, R. and Raussi-Lehto, E., Edistää, ehkäise ja vaikuta – Seksuaali- ja lisäntymisterveysten toimintaohjelma 2014–2020, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki 2014.
6. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division, World Fertility Data 2019.
7. In family statistics, children comprise the following persons living with their parents: biological children, adopted children, including biological children and adopted children of one of the spouses (foster children and children in the care of the family are not classified as children).
8. For example, in case of divorce, the child is only included in the family of one parent even if the parents, in practice, have joint custody. Children's **shared residence** was studied in the ad hoc module of the Labour Force Survey carried out by Statistics Finland in 2018. Data on shared residence were published on 17 June 2019. According to the results, there were altogether around 110,000 children living in two homes and 40,000 of those children resided for equal amounts of time in both homes.
9. In Finland, the last population registration was carried out on 1 January 1989. Since then, the Population Information System has been updated by notifications of changes. Annual notifications of changes in the population are expected by the last day of January of the following year.