

SF2.4: Share of births outside of marriage

Definitions and methodology

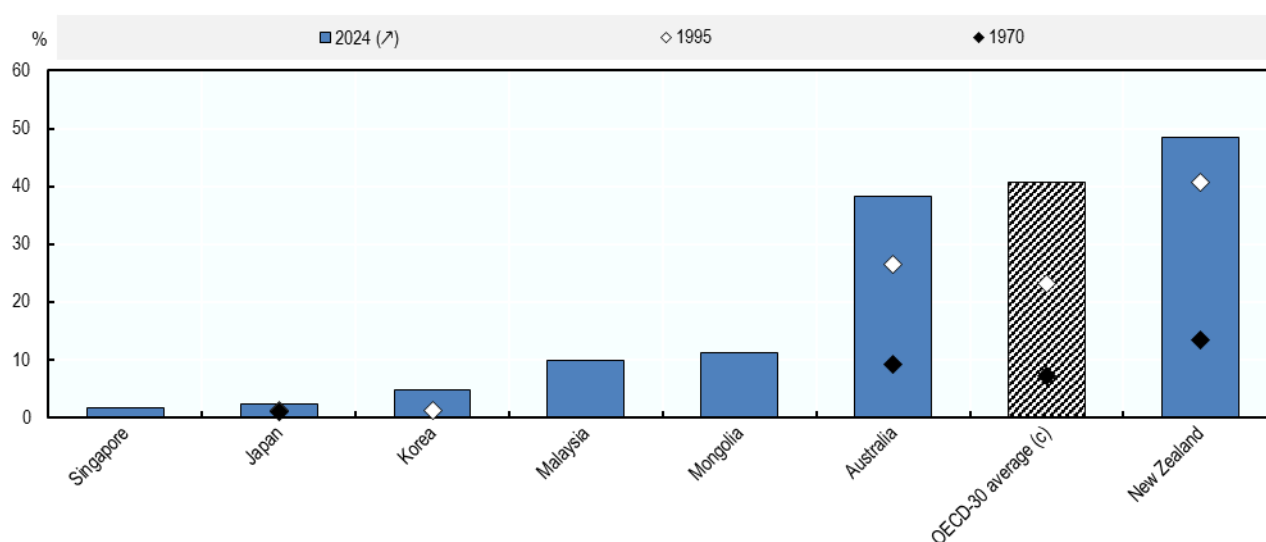
This indicator presents information on the proportion of births outside of marriage. “Births outside of marriage” are generally defined as births to mothers whose legal marital status at the time of the birth is other than married. This includes births to mothers who are single or who are cohabiting with a partner outside of marriage, births to mothers who are divorced or widowed, and births to mothers who are living with a partner in a “common-law” or “de facto” union (unless their legal marital status at the time of birth is also ‘married’). For Australia, Japan, Korea and New Zealand data refer to ex-nuptial/out-of-wedlock births, that is, where the child’s parents are not registered as married to each other (or, for New Zealand, in a civil union with each other) at the time of birth. The “share of births outside of marriage” is calculated as the number of births to women whose legal marital status at the time of the birth is other than married [or, for Australia, Japan, Korea and New Zealand, the number of ex-nuptial/out-of-wedlock births], divided by all births in the given year.

Key findings

The share of births that occur outside of marriage is very low in most Asia/Pacific countries, but there are exceptions (Chart SF2.4.A). In Japan, Korea and Singapore fewer than 5% of births occur outside of marriage. The rate is slightly higher at just under 10% in Malaysia, but this is still very low in comparison to the average for OECD countries (41%), Australia (38%), and New Zealand (48%).

Chart SF2.4.A. **Share of births outside of marriage, 1970, 1995 and 2024 or latest available year^a**

Proportion (%) of births that are ex-nuptial/out-of-wedlock births^b



Notes: a) 2024 data refer to 2023 for Australia, Korea, New Zealand and the OECD average; 2017 for Singapore; and 2015 for Malaysia.

b) Births where the child’s parents are not registered as married to each other (or, for New Zealand only, in a civil union with each other) at the time of the birth. For Singapore, data refer to the proportion of single-parent registration births by citizen mothers and births by citizen mothers who were not married to father named in the child’s birth certificate at point of birth registration. For Malaysia, the National Registration Department defines illegitimate children as those born to parents who are unmarried (or unregistered marriage (local or overseas) and for Muslim couples, children born within six (6) months from their date of marriage. For Mongolia data refer to the percentage of women who gave birth in a given year and whose marital status is other than married.

Other relevant indicators: SF2.1 Fertility rates; SF2.3 Age of mothers at childbirth and age-specific fertility; SF3.1 Marriage and divorce rate; SF3.2 Family dissolution and children

c) The OECD-30 average refers to the unweighted average across the 30 OECD member countries with available and comparable data for 2020. It is based on a slightly different definition of 'births outside of marriage' to much of the data used here - in the OECD Family Database, 'births outside of marriage' are defined as births to mothers whose legal marital status at the time of the birth is other than married. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF2.4 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [Japan: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare](#); [Korea: Korean Statistical Information Service](#); [Malaysia: National Registration Department](#); [Mongolia: National Statistics Office](#); [New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand](#); [Singapore: Ministry of Social and Family Development](#); [OECD-30 average: OECD Family Database Indicator SF2.4](#).

These cross-national differences in the share of births outside of marriage are the product of long-term trends (Chart SF2.4.A). In Japan and Korea, the frequency of births outside-of-marriage has remained low for the past four decades or so, with only very modest increases. In Japan, the share of births occurring outside-of-marriage in 2023 (2.4%) is less than 1.5 percentage points higher than it was in 1970 (0.9%). In Korea, births outside-of-marriage remained largely unchanged until 2020, when the share of births occurring outside of marriage almost doubled from 2.5% in 2020 to 4.7% in 2024. By contrast, in Australia and New Zealand, births outside-of-marriage are much more common now than they were in previous decades. In Australia, the share of births outside-of-marriage has increased by 29 percentage points since 1970, while in New Zealand the share increased by over 35 percentage points over the same period.

Comparability and data issues

Data on the marital status of mothers and/or parents at the time of birth are based on administrative data and reflect only the *legal* marital status of the individuals concerned. Differences across countries and across time in the proportion of children born outside of marriage do not necessarily reflect differences in the proportion of children born to *non-partnered* mothers and/or without a father present, since it is possible for a child to be born to a couple who are not married to each other at the time of the birth (e.g. to a cohabiting couple). In other words, differences across countries and across time in the proportion of children born outside of marriage reflect differences in the propensity of couples to become married prior to parenthood, as well as differences in the proportion of children born outside of two-parent families.

Most of the data on 'births outside of marriage' used in this indicator are based on a 'ex-nuptial' or 'out-of-wedlock' definition of births outside of marriage, with births classified as 'outside of marriage' if the child's parents are not registered as married *to each other* (or, for New Zealand, in a civil union with each other) at the time of the birth. To the extent that some children are born to mothers whose legal marital status is 'married' but who are not married to the father of the child in question, the definition used in this indicator is likely to produce higher estimates of the share of births occurring outside of marriage.

Sources and further reading: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015), *World Fertility Data 2015*, United Nations, New York; Eurostat (2023) *Statistics Explained: Marriage and birth statistics - new ways of living together in the EU*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics.