

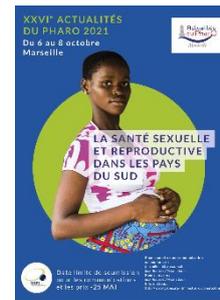
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Fertility and family planning in Africa: recent trends and associated factors

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The population growth rate of the African continent has declined from a peak of 2.82% in 1980-85, to 2.44% in 2000-2005, to 2.51% for the period 2015-2020, according to statistics from the United Nations Population Division. Despite a downward trend, population growth on the continent will still be the highest in the world in 2050 (1.74% compared to 0.53% at the global level). This high population growth masks regional disparities, with higher population growth rates in Central, West and East Africa, and lower population growth in North and Southern Africa. Like the overall trend, regional variations reflect trends in mortality and fertility. As a result of advances in public health measures and medical technology, life expectancy rose sharply over the period 1990-1995/2015-2020, from 51.9 years to 62.7 years. In contrast to mortality, fertility in Africa has declined at a slower pace: over a 25-year period, the total fertility rate (TFR) fell from an average of 5.72 children per woman (compared to a world average of 3.01) in 1990-1995 to an average of 4.44 children per woman (2.47 globally) in 2015-2020. Fertility levels remain high in Central and West Africa, while in East Africa the decline in fertility over the past two decades is comparable to the continental average. In contrast, Southern Africa and North Africa had lower fertility levels at the beginning of the period, and these continue to decline.

These contrasting fertility trends across the continent are the result of different progress in the determinants of fertility, including intermediate variables directly related to childbearing (age at first marriage, use of modern contraception, infertility, etc.) and socio-cultural variables such as urbanisation and education, as well as population policies. The anchoring of family planning policies (start date and political commitment) is an important dimension of this evolution. However, progress in education, especially for women beyond primary school - an important factor in women's empowerment - is a major determinant of changes in reproductive behaviour, including age of union and use of modern contraception.