

# New Zealand's fertility rate hits record low as births fall

**Analyst says drop in births reflect 'continued trend' of smaller family sizes and higher rates of childlessness**

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New Zealand's fertility rate slumped to a record low in 2023, official data shows, as the total number of births also dropped.

The fertility rate tracks the average number of births women will have in their lifetime. New Zealand, along with many countries around the world, has seen this number drop as factors like education, participation in the workforce, and access to contraception contribute to women having fewer children.

Statistics NZ data released on Monday found there were 1,932 fewer babies born in the year ending December 2023 than in the year before, the lowest number of registered births in 20 years. The drop was despite a 3% increase in the number of women between 15 and 49 years old, the ages at which most children are born.

The combination of fewer births and more women in the population led to the fertility rate hitting a record low of 1.56 births per woman. In 2022, the rate was 1.66, and it remains far below the 2.1 needed to replace population numbers in the long term.

"The latest decline reflects a continued trend of smaller average family-sizes and increased rates of childlessness, although the total fertility rate is also affected by changes in the age of giving birth," said Rebekah Hennessey, Stats NZ's population insights analyst.

The median age of people giving birth is 31.3 years old, compared with 31.2 in 2022. Since 1999, the age has remained stable at about 30 years, compared to the 1970s, where the median age was closer to 25.

"If women start having children later in life, they may have fewer children, which plays a part in the lower fertility rate, and the age gap between children can also affect the lower fertility rate," Hennessey said.

The figures also show that, excluding migration, New Zealand experienced its lowest annual population increase since the second world war, as it had 19,071 more births than deaths. That's compared to nearly 20,000 more births than deaths, in 2022.

New Zealand's declining fertility rates reflect international trends, particularly in the west. Sinking birthrates have prompted fears over ageing populations, workforce shortages and 'ghost towns', but the benefits of population decreases have also been noted, particularly by those worried about the effects of overpopulation on the environment.

The number of births is driven by a complex mix of social and demographic factors that change over time, Hennessey said.

"There will be a range of reasons for the drop in births in 2023, and these may include the higher cost of living, higher rents, and the cost of home ownership.

"But factors like women's education, participation in the workforce, and access to contraception have also been shown to reduce the number of babies people have," she said.