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The Netherlands: Childbearing within the context of a "Poldermodel" society

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Abstract

The Netherlands has seen a considerable decline of the period total fertility rate and delayed childbearing, just like all other European countries. The drop in fertility, however, has not been as sharp as in many other regions of Europe. The period total fertility rate in the Netherlands has stabilized since the late 1970s at around 1.6 children per woman, and it has even risen slightly since 1995. In addition, although the Netherlands has one of the oldest first-time mothers, completed fertility is still rather high compared to other European countries, suggesting a strong "catching up" of births by women in their thirties. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the main driving forces behind specific fertility trends in the Netherlands. Among other factors, it focuses on changing patterns of home leaving and union formation, declining partnership stability, and the growing acceptability and use of contraception. The chapter also looks at prolonged education, rising labor-force participation of women, economic uncertainties, the growing migrant population, and family policies. Data allowing, and to the extent possible, we examine the effects of these factors on decision-making about parenthood and the timing of childbearing.

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