

On Türkiye's recent rapid fertility decline

Sutay Yavuz | May 18, 2026



In the last decade, Türkiye has recorded the steepest fertility decline in Europe. Period indicators, however, reveal only part of the story. With a birth-order analysis Sutay Yavuz shows that second births account for the largest share of the fall, while tempo-adjusted estimates point to selective postponement concentrated at first birth.

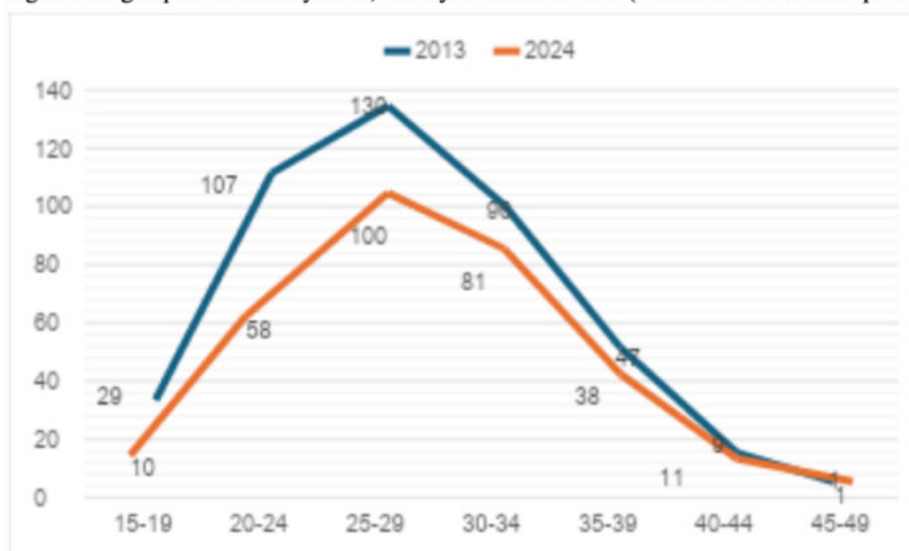
Fertility is declining all over the world, and Türkiye is no exception. Its fertility, close to replacement level for a long time, has recently recorded one of the steepest declines in Europe: from 2.11 to 1.48 children per woman between 2013 and 2024. Period measures, however, may be misleading with regard to the underlying trends: let us investigate the matter in more depth.

Reading the decline through period fertility

TurkStat publishes annual period fertility indicators, including age-specific fertility rates and the total fertility rate (TFR), but it does not release completed cohort fertility for women who have reached the end of their reproductive years. That creates an important limitation: period indicators are indispensable for tracking rapid annual change, but do not tell us how many children women will ultimately have.

Figure 1 compares age-specific fertility rates in 2013 and 2024. The age pattern of childbearing shows that fertility declined at all reproductive ages, while childbearing became more concentrated in the late 20s and early 30s. Mean age at first birth also rose in this period, from 25.5 to 27.3 years.

Figure 1. Age-specific fertility rates, Türkiye 2013 and 2024 (TFR 2.11 and 1.48 respectively)



Per thousand. Source: TurkStat, *Birth Statistics, 2024*.

Childbearing is clearly being delayed, but to what extent are we also observing a real fertility reduction? To answer this question, two steps are needed: to break the decline down by parity and to assess whether tempo effects are contributing to the observed drop.

The decline by birth order

Between 2013 and 2024, the total fertility rate fell by 0.625 births per woman. If the recent decline were mainly a story of delayed entry into parenthood, first births would be expected to account for the largest share of the downturn. But parity decomposition shows that the biggest loss comes from second births, accounting for nearly 40% of the total drop in fertility (Table 1).

Table 1. Fertility decline by birth order, 2013-2024

Birth order	TFR 2013	TFR 2024	Absolute decline	Share of total decline (%)
1	0.765	0.624	-0.141	22.6
2	0.693	0.453	-0.240	38.4
3	0.370	0.239	-0.131	21.0
4+	0.284	0.171	-0.113	18.0
Total	2.11	1.48	-0.625	100.0

Source: Author's tabulation based on parity-specific TFR estimates for 2013 and 2024.

This parity-specific pattern shows that the recent downturn is not only about whether people become parents, but also about whether families move beyond their first child. That, in turn, leads to the next question: how much of this decline reflects tempo effects, and at which birth orders are those effects strongest?

How much of the decline reflects timing?

To examine whether timing shifts are contributing to Türkiye's recent fertility decline,

Bongaarts and Feeney's (1998) adjustment by birth order can be used.

Across the period examined, the broad pattern is consistent: tempo effects are most pronounced at first birth. Table 2 illustrates this pattern for 2023. In that year, the conventional first-birth rate was 0.618, while the corresponding tempo-adjusted value was 0.787. The gap is much larger than for higher birth orders, which indicates that postponement is strongest at first births.

Table 2. Conventional and tempo-adjusted fertility by birth order, Türkiye, 2023

Birth order	TFR 2023	Adjusted TFR	Tempo Gap
1	0.618	0.787	0.169
2	0.464	0.512	0.048
3	0.252	0.273	0.021
4+	0.182	0.189	0.007
Total	1.516	1.761	0.245

Source: Author's tabulation based on 2023 parity-specific tempo-adjusted estimates.

Timing, equity, and policy

As recent N-IUSSP discussion has noted, fertility postponement is not a universal correlate of fertility decline (Spoorenberg and Skirbekk 2026). With regard to Türkiye, while definitive conclusions are not possible, the available evidence suggests a mixed pattern: delayed family formation, combined with weaker progression beyond the first child.

If sustaining fertility is a policy goal in Türkiye, the focus should be less on broad numerical targets (e.g. "three children per family") and more on the points where the current decline is concentrated: delayed family formation and weaker progression to a second birth. As childlessness still appears relatively limited, the more immediate concern seems to be the possible consolidation of the one-child family norm. Economic and social conditions must be improved so that having two children, as in the previous decade, becomes both possible and desirable again.

References

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