



FERTILITY INTENTIONS | YEAR 2024

Fewer people intend to have a child

➔ In 2024, only 21.2% of people aged 18–49 reported that they (certainly or probably) intended to have a child within the next three years, down from 25.0% in 2003.

More than 10.5 million individuals state that they do not wish to have children either in the three years following the interview or at any point in the future. Among those expressing no fertility intentions, around one-third mention economic reasons, 9.4% refer to inadequate working conditions, and 8.6% report the absence of a partner.

Half of all women believe that the arrival of a child would worsen their employment opportunities (rising to over 65% among women aged 18–24), whereas 59.0% of men expect no impact on their own prospects.

When asked which policies should be prioritised to support fertility, 28.5% identify economic support measures, followed by childcare services (26.1%) and housing-related benefits (23.1%).

Fewer than half of the women who wished to have a child in 2016 succeeded in doing so within the subsequent three years.

45.6%

Proportion of 18–49-year-olds who intend to have a child within three years or in the future

50.7% in 2003.

41.7%

Share of those who wish to have two children

14.4% intend to have three or more.

26.9%

Share of graduate women who intend to have a child within the next three years

26.0% among employed women.

Formattato: Allineato a sinistra

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For several decades, Italy has been undergoing a major demographic transformation marked by a sustained decline in births (1.18 children per woman in 2024, compared with 1.29 in 2003). Increasingly, young adults are choosing to postpone, or forgo altogether, the project of forming a family with children, amid economic uncertainty, labour-market precariousness, and changing life-course norms.

In a context in which most people of reproductive age use contraception to control childbearing (65.1% among women aged 15–49), fertility intentions offer valuable insights into the short- to medium-term possibility for future fertility. Analysing such intentions can therefore help, inform, and target policy measures for supporting childbearing.

Over one fifth plan a child within three years; one third postpones, but still wants children later

In 2024, 21.2% of people aged 18–49 (around 4.5 million individuals) reported intending to have a child within the three years following the interview. Unless otherwise specified, “intending to have a child” includes both respondents who stated they “certainly” want a child and those who stated they “probably” want one. The same definition applies, conversely, to those reporting that they do not want children. In both cases, estimates refer to all respondents, irrespective of whether they already have children.

The share intending to have a child within three years is lower than in 2003 (25.0%). This decline over the past two decades partly reflects population ageing within ages 18–49, with an increase in the proportion aged 45–49 (from 14.7% in 2003 to 19.9% in 2024), who are close to the end of their reproductive age and, in most cases, have already realised their fertility plans. Conversely, 74.2% reported not intending to have a child within the next three years (71.2% in 2003). A further 4.7% did not report their fertility intentions.

Among those not intending to have a child within three years, around one third (5.2 million people) nevertheless reported wanting a child beyond that time horizon (32.6%), a level just over three percentage points lower than in 2003 (36.0%) (Table 1).

In 2024, the shares of men and women reporting positive intentions within three years are very similar. Positive intentions are most common at ages 25–34 (38.5%) and 35–44 (21.6%), life-course phases in which childbearing is more often actively planned or completed towards the desired family size.

TABLE 1. PEOPLE INTENDING TO HAVE A CHILD WITHIN THREE YEARS OF THE INTERVIEW AND AT IN THE FUTURE, BY SEX AND AGE CLASS. Years 2024 and 2003; per 100 individuals aged 18–49 of the same sex and age class.

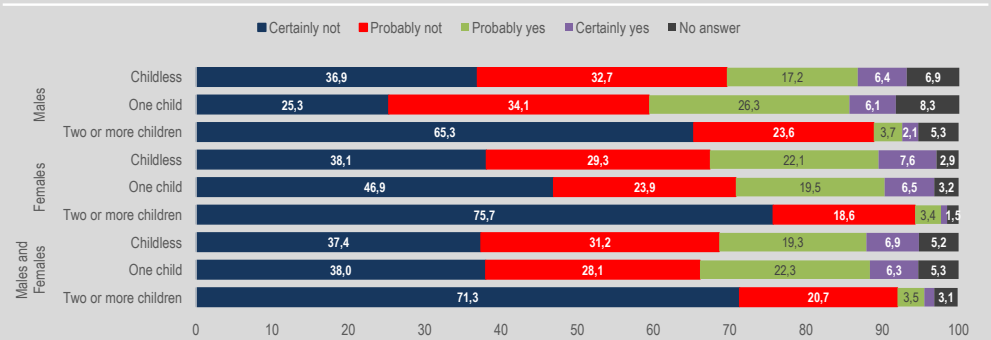
Age class	INTENTION WITHIN THE 3 YEARS FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW				INTENTION IN THE FUTURE(a)			
	2024		2003		2024		2003	
	Probably yes	Certainly yes	Probably yes	Certainly yes	Probably yes	Certainly yes	Probably yes	Certainly yes
Males								
18-24	5.6	1.2	5.7	1.2	42.5	44.7	49.6	38.2
25-34	24.5	11.2	30.7	11.2	39.3	19.4	45.9	25.5
35-44	19.3	5.5	19.4	7.5	12.4	1	12.9	2
45-49	5.7	1.0	5.3	1.1	6.6	0.0	2.9	0.8
Total	15.6	5.4	18.8	6.7	24.8	15.7	27.1	15.3
Females								
18-24	11.4	3.4	13.9	4.7	38.2	37.3	38.2	50.7
25-34	31.4	10.2	33.5	15.2	29.5	10.2	34.3	16.3
35-44	13.3	5.1	12.0	4.7	3.3	0.3	5.0	1.2
45-49	3.5	0.9	1.0	0.3	1.4	0	1.0	0.5
Total	16.0	5.3	17.3	7.3	15.2	9.7	16.4	13.3
Males and Females								
18-24	8.4	2.3	9.8	2.9	40.5	41.3	44.2	44.1
25-34	27.8	10.7	32.1	13.2	34.7	15.1	40.5	21.2
35-44	16.3	5.3	15.7	6.1	7.5	0.6	8.7	1.5
45-49	4.6	0.9	3.0	0.7	3.7	0	1.9	0.7
Total	15.8	5.4	18.0	7.0	19.9	12.7	21.7	14.3

(a) Per 100 individuals aged 18–49 who do not intend to have children within the three years following the interview.
Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Years 2024 and 2003.

Among men with at least one child, the share intending another child is highest

Among those who already have one child, around one third of men and just over one quarter of women report intending to have another child within three years of the interview (32.4% and 26.0%, respectively), suggesting an intention to continue or complete their fertility plans. By contrast, among those with no children, the share intending a child within three years is lower among men (23.6%) and higher among women (29.7%). Finally, among those with two or more children, the corresponding shares are markedly lower for both sexes (5.8% among men and 4.2% among women) (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. PEOPLE INTENDING TO HAVE A CHILD WITHIN THREE YEARS OF THE INTERVIEW, BY SEX AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN. Year 2024; per 100 individuals aged 18–49 of the same sex and number of children.



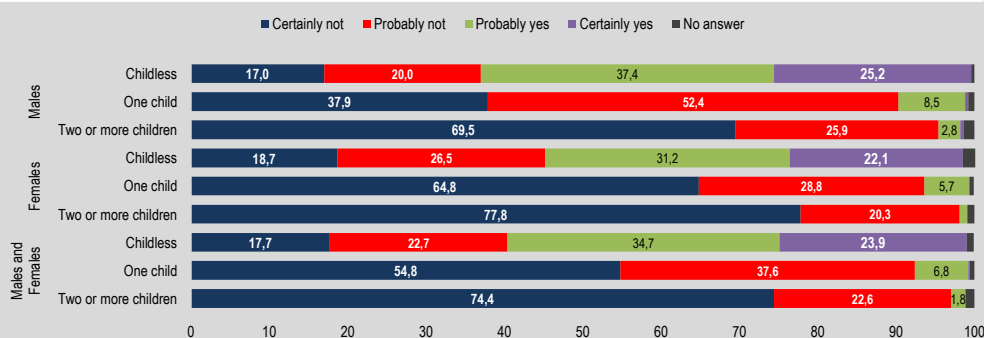
Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Year 2024.

Most people aged 18–24 want to have children in the future

Almost 90% of people aged 18–24 do not intend to have a child within the next three years, a choice that is likely linked to the desire to complete education and training. Among them, however, the large majority (81.8%) report that they would like to have a child at some point in the future (almost 3 million people). In particular, the share is 87.2% among young men (44.7% report being certain), while it is lower among young women, at 75.5% (37.3% report being certain). By contrast, among those aged 45–49 who do not intend to have a child within three years (an age group in which individuals who have already realised their fertility plans are more common), 95.0% report not intending to have children in the future. The share is even higher among women (96.9%), who are nearing the end of their reproductive years.

Just under 5 million people, almost 60% of those who have not had children and do not intend to have a child within three years, report that they would like to have children in the future. In particular, childless men are more likely to report intentions for fatherhood beyond the three-year horizon (62.6%, with one quarter reporting strong intentions). By contrast, among those who already have one child or two or more children, the shares reporting that they do not intend to have any further children are very high (92.4% and 97.0%, respectively) (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. PEOPLE INTENDING TO HAVE A CHILD IN THE FUTURE, BY SEX AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN. Year 2024; per 100 individuals aged 18–49 who do not intend to have a child within three years, of the same sex and number of children.



Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Year 2024.

The share considering two children as the ideal family size is declining

Over 4 million people, 41.7% of those aged 18–49 who intend to have a child within three years or in future, report that they would like to have two children (it was 46.0% in 2016). A further 14.4% would like three or more children (21.8% in 2016), 7.5% would like only one, while 36.0% are unable to indicate a specific number. Preferences for two children are most common among women aged up to 34 (44.9% among those aged 25–34 and 43.9% among those aged 18–24). Younger people more often envisage larger families: just under one fifth of those aged 18–24 would like three or more children. By contrast, the preference for one child is more common among those nearing the end of their reproductive age, especially women aged 45–49 (22.1%) and men in the same age group (18.7%).

In the North of the country, the share indicating two children as the desired number is higher than the national average (48.4% in the North-West and 46.0% in the North-East). In the North-West, the one-child model is also relatively common (9.7%), while in the North-East there is a stronger tendency than elsewhere to desire larger families (16.4% would like three or more children). In the Centre, 39.7% report a preference for two children. In the South, only around one third indicate two as the desired number, while 47.1% are unable to express a preference; high levels of uncertainty are also observed in the central municipalities of metropolitan areas (42.0%) and in the Islands (40.0%).

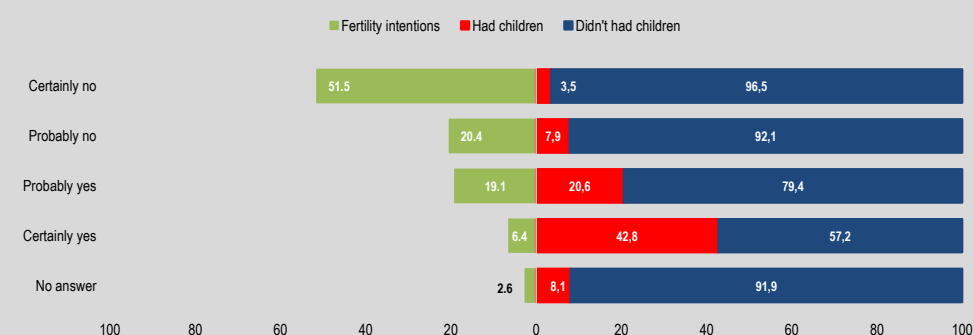
Fewer than half of women realise their desired parenthood

The analysis of fertility intentions can be further developed by comparing stated fertility intentions with subsequent behaviours. To this end, the fertility intentions of 5,587 women aged 18–49 interviewed in the 2016 *Families and Social Subjects* survey were examined in relation to the number of children they had in the following years.

Among women interviewed in 2016, 6.4% reported a definite intention to have a child within the next three years, while 19.1% reported that they would probably have one. These intentions were realised in 42.8% of cases among those answering “Certainly yes”, and in 20.6% among those answering “Probably yes” (Figure 3). Overall, 40.4% of women expressing positive intentions subsequently realised them.

A multivariate logistic regression indicates that, among women with positive intentions, the likelihood of having a child is higher for those who are younger, more highly educated, already have children, and are in employment. All other conditions being equal, women with a university degree have almost twice the probability of realising their fertility intentions compared with those with at most primary education. In addition, employed women have a probability more than one third higher of realising their intentions than women who do not work or are in other labour-market conditions.

FIGURE 3. WOMEN AGED 18–49 WHO, IN 2016, INTENDED TO HAVE A CHILD WITHIN THREE YEARS AND THE REALISATION OF THEIR REPRODUCTIVE PLAN IN THE SUBSEQUENT THREE YEARS. Percentage values.



Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Year 2016.

In one case out of three, economic reasons underpin the decision not to have children

Among people of reproductive age (18–49), over 10.5 million do not intend to have children or any additional children over their lifetime. Of these, 62.2% report having given up because of difficulties encountered in pursuing their fertility intentions; 32.0% report having already reached the number of children they desired (a level like 31.7% in 2016); and 5.5% state that having children is not part of their life plan (4.4% in 2016) (Figure 4).

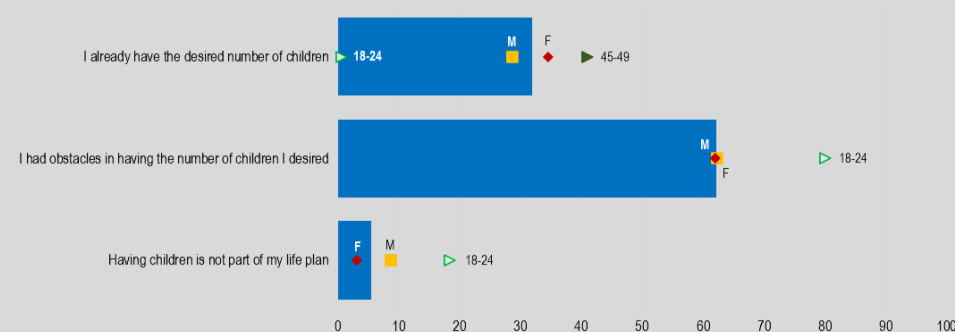
Among the 6.6 million people who reported difficulties in realising their desired childbearing, one third cite economic reasons, one fifth reasons related to age, 11.5% report caring responsibilities for elderly parents, 9.4% consider their employment conditions inadequate, and 8.6% cite the absence of a partner.

Economic reasons are reported most frequently by men aged 25–34 (52.0%), while age-related difficulties are reported by around half of those aged 45–49 (51.7% among women). In this latter group, 17.9% report having to care for their parents.

Work-related reasons are reported mainly by women aged 25–44; in particular, almost one quarter of women aged 25–34 report lacking sufficient job security to have a child.

Employment uncertainty or the absence of work is reported as an obstacle by around one fifth of women with at least two children. Among childless people, over one fifth of women and 17.8% of men attribute the non-realisation of their parenthood plans to the lack of a stable partner.

FIGURE 4. MAIN REASON FOR NOT WANTING TO HAVE CHILDREN OR ANY ADDITIONAL CHILDREN, BY SEX AND AGE CLASS. Year 2024; per 100 individuals aged 28–49 who do not intend to have children within three years or in the future, of the same sex and age class.



Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Year 2024.

Two in three young women fear employment penalties following the arrival of a child

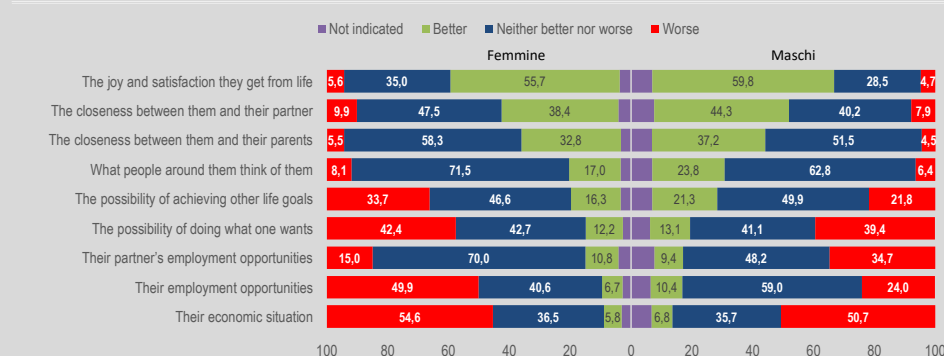
Factors shaping the gap between fertility intentions and their realisation are several and span different life domains, highlighting various areas of vulnerability. Marked gender differences emerge, for example, in views related to employment. One half of women believe that having a child within the next three years could worsen their job opportunities; this share exceeds 65% among the youngest women. By contrast, among men 59.0% report that having a child would have no negative nor positive effect on their own job opportunities. It is also noteworthy that 34.7% of men believe their partner's employment conditions could worsen following the arrival of a child, a share that rises to 43.7% among those aged 18–24. Among women, this concern is much less common: only 15.0% believe their partner's employment conditions could worsen (Figure 5).

The economic consequences of having a child are a concern for over one half of men (50.7%) and women (54.6%), peaking among younger people (over two thirds). In addition, among younger respondents the view that a child could be an obstacle to doing what one wants is widespread (56.1%), whereas in older age groups this perception is less common (around 37%).

Aspects related to the personal sphere, such as closeness between partners and enjoyment of life, are more often evaluated positively in relation to having a child (41.4% and 57.8%, respectively), particularly among those aged 18–24 (54.3% and 61.4%).

Some social contexts may also exert pressure on individuals to have a child. One in five people report that, if they had a child in the next three years, others' opinions of them would improve; among women aged 25–34, this share reaches 25.0%. Women in the same age group report being encouraged (often or sometimes) by friends and parents to have a(nother) child (39.9% by friends and 28.1% by parents). In addition, around one quarter report feeling their partner influences their decision to have a child, a perception also reported by one fifth of men of the same age.

FIGURE 5. PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING A CHILD WITHIN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, BY SEX. Year 2024; per 100 individuals aged 18–49 of the same sex.



Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Year 2024.

Economic support is considered the most important measure to foster childbearing

People aged 18–49 were asked which measure they considered most important for supporting childbearing and for children's growth and education. For each proposed measure, respondents could assign a score from 1 (the most important) to 6 (the least important). The measure most frequently rated 1 or 2 is economic support (28.5%). Women aged 40–49 are the most likely to prioritise economic support (31.3% assign it a score of 1 or 2). Childcare services are ranked highest (scores 1 or 2) by 26.1% of respondents, and this share is higher among younger people (28.0% among those aged 18–29) (Figure 6).

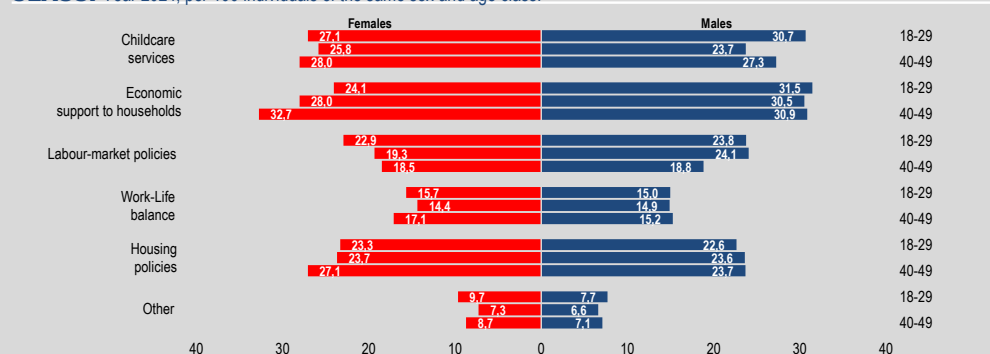
Housing policies rank third: 23.1% place subsidised rents or mortgages in the first or second position. Labour-market policies rank fourth, placed in the top two positions by 20.2% overall, rising to 22.6% among those aged 18–29. Finally, work–family balance policies are considered essential by 14.8%.

Having had one or more children is associated with different priorities. Three in ten people with at least one child prioritise economic support. Among those with one child, subsidised rents and mortgages are more often seen as key to encouraging births (24.6%). Among those with two or more children, an expansion of childcare services is more frequently prioritised (27.0%). By contrast, childless respondents most often prioritise labour-market policies (22.4% place them in the top two positions). Work–family balance measures, such as flexible working hours, extended parental leave, and greater recognition of part-time work, are more frequently prioritised by women with one child (16.5%).

Policy needs and the measures considered most important also show substantial territorial differences. For example, economic support for families is indicated as a priority (scores 1 or 2) by one third of residents in the Islands and by 30.9% of those in the North-East. Childcare services are especially prioritised by residents in the Islands (28.5%), consistent with the limited availability of early childhood education and care in these areas: in the Islands, coverage is 17.8 places per 100 children aged 0–2, compared with 38.8 places in the Centre.

Measures providing subsidised rents and mortgages are prioritised by 26.4% of residents in the Centre and by 27.5% of those living in the central municipalities of metropolitan areas, where housing constraints are particularly salient, and both rents and average monthly mortgage repayments are higher. Tackling employment precariousness and supporting the labour-market integration of women and young people are prioritised by 23.2% of residents in the Islands and are also strongly emphasised in the central municipalities of metropolitan areas (25.5%) and in municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants (24.0%). Finally, work–family reconciliation policies are prioritised by 17.1% of residents in the North-East.

FIGURE 6. MEASURES CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT FOR SUPPORTING CHILDBEARING AND CHILDREN'S GROWTH AND EDUCATION, BY SEX AND AGE CLASS. Year 2024; per 100 individuals of the same sex and age class.



Source: Istat, Families and Social Subjects, Year 2024.

Glossary

Average number of children per woman (Total fertility rate): the sum of age-specific fertility rates, calculated for each reproductive age (15–49) as the ratio between the number of live births and the average annual female population.

Birth rate: the ratio between the number of live births in a year and the average resident population, multiplied by 1,000.

Desired number of children: the number of children a person would like to have over their lifetime. It captures one dimension of fertility intentions.

Educational level: the highest educational qualification obtained in any school (public or private, Italian or foreign) whether in Italy or abroad.

Employment status:

- Employed: a person who has a job, either self-employed or as an employee, from which they receive profit or remuneration (income, fee, salary, wage), or who helps a family member in a self-employed activity without a regular employment contract (unpaid family worker).
- Unemployed: a person who has lost a previous employee job, or who has never worked and is actively seeking a job that they are able to take up if offered.
- Homemaker: a person mainly engaged in domestic work.
- Student: a person mainly engaged in study.
- Retired from work: a person who has stopped working due to reaching retirement age, disability, or other reasons; this does not necessarily coincide with being a pensioner, since a person retired from work does not always receive a pension.
- Other status: a person in a situation different from those listed above (unable to work, economically independent, receiving a pension for reasons unrelated to employment, etc.).

Fertility intentions: refer to people's desires, plans, and expectations regarding future childbearing. They concern both the decision to have or not have children and the timing and number of children desired. They differ from fertility behaviour (actual births), as they reflect stated attitudes and intentions rather than actions already realised.

Geographical macro-areas: a territorial classification organised as follows:

- North: Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste, Liguria, Lombardia (North-West); Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna (North-East).
- Centre: Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio.
- Mezzogiorno (South): Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria (South); Sicilia, Sardegna (Islands).

Policy measures: a set of interventions, rules, or actions adopted by public institutions to achieve specific social, economic, or demographic goals.

Methodological note

Families and Social Subjects Survey

Information objectives

The *Families and Social Subjects* survey is the main statistical source on family structure and the social characteristics of families in Italy. It provides in-depth information on: the life course; relationships within the family; networks with relatives, friends and neighbours; support received by families and help provided to non-co-resident persons; childcare and child custody arrangements; couple life and first marriages; young people's prolonged co-residence with parents and intentions to leave the family of origin; fertility intentions; social mobility; household economy and domestic work; family customs and traditions; family care and support services; links with the labour market and job search; employment trajectories; and housing characteristics.

The survey is included in the National Statistical Programme.

Frequency and fieldwork period

The survey is sample-based and is conducted on an occasional basis.

Target population

The population of interest consists of individuals aged 18 and over who are resident in Italy. The survey is conducted on a sample of around 30,000 individuals and the fieldwork took place between May and September 2024.

Data-collection strategy and instruments

The survey uses a data-collection model composed of: (i) a Household form, which records kinship relationships and other socio-demographic and socio-economic information on household members; and (ii) an Individual form, which collects information on the respondent's life course, family relationships, support networks, achieved and planned fertility, employment history, and opinions on selected aspects of life.

In the first stage, individuals are invited to take part by completing the questionnaire online (CAWI). In this phase, the questionnaire is self-administered by the respondent. Subsequently, individuals who did not participate via the web are offered the option of being interviewed through CAPI, with the assistance of a municipal interviewer administering the questionnaire.

Further information on the *Families and Social Subjects* survey and the questionnaire used for data collection is available at the following link (Italian only): <https://www.istat.it/informazioni-sulla-rilevazione/famiglia-e-soggetti-sociali-anno-2024>.

Territorial detail

The survey population of interest, i.e., the set of statistical units under investigation, consists of adult residents in Italy, excluding permanent members of collective households.

The territorial study domains (reference areas for the population parameters to be estimated) are:

- the national territory as a whole;
- the five geographical macro-areas (North-West, North-East, Centre, South, Islands);
- a municipal typology that classifies Italian municipalities into six groups defined by socio-economic and demographic characteristics:
 - o A) Metropolitan-area municipalities, subdivided into:
 - A1) Central municipalities of metropolitan areas: Torino, Milano, Venezia, Genova, Bologna, Firenze, Roma, Napoli, Bari, Palermo, Catania, Cagliari;
 - A2) Municipalities surrounding the central metropolitan municipalities (belonging to the corresponding local labour systems);
 - o B) Non-metropolitan municipalities, subdivided into:
 - B1) Municipalities with up to 2,000 inhabitants;
 - B2) Municipalities with 2,001 to 10,000 inhabitants;
 - B3) Municipalities with 10,001 to 50,000 inhabitants;
 - B4) Municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants.

Procedure for defining the realisation of fertility intentions

To study the realisation of fertility intentions, a dataset was constructed through record linkage between the 2016 *Families, Social Subjects, and Life Cycle* (FSS) and the 2023 *Individual Base Register* (RBI).

Using record linkage techniques and pseudonymised keys, the two sources (FSS and RBI) were linked to analyse births among women aged 18–49.

The process is composed of three main stages: (i) pseudonymisation and linkage using individual (SIM) and family keys (cod_famiglia); (ii) sample selection, resulting in 5,587 women belonging to 5,432 families, for a total of 17,185 individuals in RBI2023; and (iii) birth analysis, identifying 1,031 children born after 2016 to 854 mothers.

This dataset made it possible to divide the observation period into two phases: the first three years following the survey (consistent with the question on three-year intentions) and the subsequent period, thereby also enabling the study of postponed fertility.

Probability of realising fertility intentions

To identify the most important factors associated with the realisation of desired fertility, while controlling for variables that contribute to its realisation (age group, educational attainment, employment status, geographical macro-area, assessment of household economic resources, and number of children already born), a multivariate analysis was conducted using logistic regression. The results are presented in the section “Fewer than half of women realise their desired parenthood”.

Further reading

Istat. (2025, 21 October). *Births and fertility of the resident population - Year 2024*.

Istat. (2025, 7 October). *Le spese per i consumi delle famiglie – Anno 2024*. (in Italian)

Istat. (2024, 16 October). *I servizi educativi per l'infanzia in Italia. Anno educativo 2022/2023 – Stato dell'arte, personale e accessibilità dell'offerta Zerotre*. (in Italian)

Istat. (2017). *La salute riproduttiva della donna*. Collana Letture statistiche – Temi. ISBN 978-88-458-1944-5. (in Italian)

Data dissemination and terms of use

The main results of such analyses are available on the thematic website demo.istat.it.

An accompanying Statistical Annex is released together with this communication.

The [IstatData data warehouse](#) includes the theme “Fertility intentions”.

Reproduction of the information contained in this note and in the demo.istat.it database is permitted, provided that the source (Istat) is acknowledged.

For technical and methodological clarifications

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