

DATA AT A GLANCE

# Roughly Half of the World’s Countries Have Transitioned to the Lowest Total Fertility Level After 56 Years

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The World Bank (2017) has a 1960–2016 data set on the total fertility rates (TFR) of 189 countries. TFR refers to the number of children a woman/group of women would have if she/they would have to pass through the reproductive ages and bearing children according to prevailing fertility rates. How has the TFR decreased in each of these countries in 56 years? Data were analyzed, with enlightening results.

Table 1 shows that, in 1960, the majority of the 189 countries (52.9%) had a TFR of more than 6.0 children, a fourth of these countries (24.3%) at that time had a TFR of 2.2–4.0 and a fifth (19.6%) had a TFR of 4.1–6.0. Very few countries (3.2%) had the lowest fertility level of  $\leq 2.1$  in 1960.

In 2016, roughly six decades after, approximately half of the 189 countries (48.6%) had transitioned to having the lowest TFR of  $\leq 2.1$ , including countries whose TFR in 1960 was very high ( $>6$  children), such as Bahrain (from a TFR of 7.09 in 1960 to 2.03 in 2016) and Kuwait (from a TFR of 7.24 in 1960 to 1.97 in 2016). The rest of the 189 countries in 2016 had a TFR of 2.2–4.0 (31.7%) and 4.1–6.0 (18.1%), but only a handful (1.6%) had remained to have a high TFR of  $>6.0$ .

Overall, 75% of the countries included in the analysis experienced a reduction of 33%–80% in their TFR from 1960 to 2016 (not in the table). The decreasing numbers of children being born worldwide have broad-based development implications that demand attention.

**Table 1**  
*Percentage Distribution of 189 Countries According to Categorized TFR, in 1960 and in 2016*

Year	TFR			
	$\leq 2.1$	2.2-4.0	4.1-6.0	$>6.0$
1960	3.2% (e.g., Japan, Hungary)	24.3% (e.g., Uruguay, Argentina)	19.6% (e.g., Singapore, South Africa)	52.9% (e.g., Kuwait, Bahrain)
2016	48.6% (Kuwait, Bahrain)	31.7%	18.1%	1.6% (e.g., Congo, Somalia, Niger)

## Reference

The World Bank. (2017). *Fertility rate, total (births per woman)*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/JHQrDk>

DATA AT A GLANCE

# Very Few Countries Worldwide Have Improved Their Press Freedom Scores

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No country in the world accords the press with full freedom. Some restrictions, whether from the government and other sectors, are still in place, thus preventing the press from truly exercising their responsibilities. Throughout the globe, which countries have significantly improved their scores in press freedom?

Using the 2017–2019 data of Reporters Without Borders (2019) that provide press freedom scores for 180 countries, we identified the number of countries whose scores have significantly improved during the period. In our analysis, a score is considered to have significantly improved if it has increased by at least 10%. The press freedom scores are based on seven indicators, such as pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, infrastructure, and abuses.

Table 1 reveals that only a handful of countries (less than 10% or 6–13 countries) were found to have significantly improved their press freedom scores in 2017–2019. Of these handful countries, three (i.e., Gambia, Netherlands, and Portugal) have significantly improved their scores both in 2017–2018 and in 2018–2019. For example, Gambia saw its scores increased by 17.85% in 2017–2018 and 18.27% in 2018–2019.

Rather than having improved scores, some countries have decreased scores in press freedom (not in the table). Data suggest that 10 countries in 2017–2018 and 11 countries in 2018–2019 have decreased scores during these years. Three countries, namely, Chile, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, have reduced scores both in 2017–2018 and in 2018–2019. Slovakia was

**Table 1**

*Countries With Significantly and Consistently Improved Press Freedom Scores*

Categories	2017-2018	2018-2019
Number of countries with significantly improved scores	6	13
Countries that consistently significantly improved their scores	3 (Gambia, Netherlands, and Portugal)	

found to have decreased its scores by 30.62% and 16.38%, respectively.

Countries need to institute appropriate reforms to guarantee greater or full press freedom, but there has to be an external body to oversee and monitor the status, extent, and outcomes of reforms.

## Reference

Reporters Without Borders. (2019). *World press freedom index*. Retrieved from <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>