

Transitioning Political Support for Family Planning Into Action in the Philippines

The Philippine Population Is Outgrowing Neighboring Countries

The Philippines has the largest annual population growth rate in Southeast Asia and the current population of 105 million is expected to grow to 125.5 million by 2030.¹ Filipino family sizes and birth rates are among the highest in the region. On average, Filipino women have three children.

The Philippines Is Leading in Fertility and Birth Rates in Southeast Asia

	Total Fertility Rate	Births per 1,000 Population
Philippines	2.8	23
Laos	2.8	24
Cambodia	2.6	24
Indonesia	2.4	19
Myanmar	2.3	18
Vietnam	2.1	16
Malaysia	2.0	17
Brunei	1.9	16
Thailand	1.5	11
Singapore	1.2	9

Source: Toshiko Kaneda and Genevieve Dupuis, *2017 World Population Data Sheet* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2017).

High fertility places greater responsibility on working-age adults and government resources to provide for the children in a population. Nearly one-third of Filipinos, 32 percent, are children and less than 5 percent are elderly, resulting in a dependency ratio of 58.2 dependents per 100 working-age adults, the second highest dependency ratio in the region.²



Most Married Women Use Less-Effective, Short-Acting Contraceptive Methods

Contraception aids women and their families to plan their desired family sizes by helping to space or limit pregnancies. In 2016, 2 million pregnancies occurred to Filipino women who wanted to wait to have more children or wanted to stop having children altogether.³

Long-acting methods (female and male sterilization, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and implants) are the most effective methods of contraception, providing near perfect protection from pregnancy. Yet, more than two-thirds of married women who are using a modern method of contraception are using a short-term method.

Thirty-Eight Percent of Married Women in the Philippines Use a Modern Method

Modern Method	Percent Current Use of Method by Married Women (Ages 15-49)
Female Sterilization	8.5
Male Sterilization	0.1
Pill	19.1
IUD	3.5
Injectable	3.7
Male Condom	1.9
Other Modern	0.8

Long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) protects women from unwanted pregnancies for three to 10 years and offers rapid return to fertility upon termination of the method. In the Philippines, IUDs and recently implants, are LARC options available on the market. The latest Demographic and Health Survey estimated only 17 percent of women knew about implants and 82 percent knew about IUDs as a contraceptive option. Education and counseling are needed to increase Filipino women's awareness and acceptance of implants as a safe, effective, and reversible contraceptive option.

Poor Women Are More Likely to Have Larger Families Than Wealthy Women Despite a Desire for Fewer Children

The poorest women in the Philippines have 3.5 more children, on average, than the wealthiest women in the country. Moreover, while the wealthiest women, generally, have close to the family size that they desire, poorer women have about 2 more children than they desire.

Women in the Lowest Quintile Have the Highest Total and Wanted Fertility Rate

Wealth Quintile	Total Fertility Rate	Wanted Fertility Rate
Lowest	5.2	3.3
Second	3.7	2.5
Middle	3.1	2.2
Fourth	2.4	1.9
Highest	1.7	1.4

Sexually-Active Youth Face Increased Risk of Unwanted Pregnancies

The Philippines has one of the highest adolescent fertility rates in the region, at 57 births per 1,000 adolescent girls (ages 15 to 19).⁴ The average age of early motherhood (first birth before age 20) is 17.8.⁵ Most young women who are sexually active are exposed to risks of unwanted pregnancy because they are not using any method of contraception. If using contraception, young women are more likely to use withdrawal, the least effective contraceptive option. Among unmarried and sexually active young women, 17 percent use withdrawal, and among married young women, 15 percent use withdrawal.

Fertility Preferences and Contraceptive Use Among Women Under Age 19

Relationship Status	Percent of Women (Ages 15-19) Who Report Not Wanting a Child in the Next Two Years	Percent of Women (Ages 15-19) Who Are Currently Using Any Method of Contraception
In Union	70.9	45.5
Unmarried but Sexually Active	80.5	30.5

Young women are also at risk of coercive sex by older men. Thirteen percent of girls under the age of 17 reported having sex with a man who was more than 10 years older; those with less education are more likely to have had an older sexual partner.

Young Women With Less Education Report Higher Percentage of Sex With Older Men

Education Level	Percentage of Adolescent Girls (Ages 15-19) Who Had Sexual Intercourse With a Man 10+ Years Older
Elementary	18.3
High School	9.7
College	1.9

Five-Year Controversy Over Reproductive Health Policy Stalls Implementation

The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act, a national policy on reproductive health and population development, was halted shortly after implementation. Policy debate involving all three branches of government continued for five years.

DECEMBER 2012: Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act signed into law, guaranteeing universal access to modern contraception and care for postabortion complications at government facilities, age-appropriate reproductive health education in government schools, and increased maternal health care.

APRIL 2014: Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act deemed constitutional with eight exceptions.

JUNE 2015: Temporary Restraining Order issued by the Supreme Court that stopped the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from recertification and distribution of all pending contraception applicants for registration and ordered the Department of Health to stop procuring, selling, distributing, dispensing or administering, advertising, and promoting Implanon and Implanon NXT.

JANUARY 2017: President Duterte released Executive Order 12 ordering an acceleration of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act to ensure “zero unmet need” particularly among poor women.

MARCH 2017: Department of Health released Administrative Order 2017-0005 that provided guidance to local and district health facilities on accelerated implementation of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act.

NOVEMBER 2017: FDA declared 51 contraceptive brands on the market are not abortifacients, including implants, injectables, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and pill options. The Supreme Court lifts temporary restraining order.

With the official recognition of the constitutionality of the Reproductive Health (RH) Act and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of all major modern contraception, it is time to fully implement the RH Act. Considering the status of family planning in the Philippines, the government should:

- Rapidly distribute contraceptive methods available in the market before 2018 expiration.
- Ensure sustainable and adequate funds to fully implement the RH Act.
- Ensure family planning services are provided free of charge to poor families.
- Upgrade public health facilities and increase family planning and reproductive health provider training.
- Work with partners to provide information and training.
- Standardize and harmonize family planning data collection, monitoring, and evaluation, from the basic centers to the cities and provinces, to the regions and the Family Health Office.

References

- 1 United Nations (UN), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UNPD), *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision* (New York: UN, 2017); and Toshiko Kaneda and Genevieve Dupuis, *2017 World Population Data Sheet* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2017).
- 2 UNPD, *World Population Prospects*.
- 3 Family Planning 2020, “FP2020 Momentum at the Midpoint 2015-2016,” (November 2016), accessed at <http://progress.familyplanning2020.org/>, on Oct 1, 2017.
- 4 Kaneda and Dupuis, *2017 World Population Data Sheet*.
- 5 World Health Organization and Human Reproduction Program Research for Impact, “Adolescent Contraceptive Use Data From the Philippines Demographic and Health Survey, 2013” (2016), accessed at: <http://apps.who.int/>, on Oct 1, 2017.



forumforfp.org



prb.org