

Statistical bulletin

Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2021

Annual live births in England and Wales by sex, birthweight, gestational age, ethnicity and month, maternities by place of birth and with multiple births, and stillbirths by age of parents and calendar quarter.



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(provisional)

Correc

3 May 2024 08:18

We have identified an error in the processing of birthweights depending on gestational age. This has affected the proportion of preterm births for 2021 and the data in Figure 3 in this release. This has now been corrected in both the text and chart.

The stillbirth rate for women aged 40 years and over was affected by a rounding error. The rate has been corrected in the main points text and figure 2. The value was corrected from 5.9% to 6.0%

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1 . Main points

- In 2021, the average age of mothers who gave birth in England and Wales increased to 30.9 years, while the average age of fathers remained at 33.7 years.
- The highest stillbirth rate in 2021 remained in women aged 40 years and over at 6.0 stillbirths per 1,000 births, followed by women aged under 20 years at 5.0 stillbirths per 1,000 births.
- Babies from the Black ethnic group continued to have the highest stillbirth rate at 6.9 stillbirths per 1,000 births in 2021.
- The overall percentage of preterm live births increased slightly from 7.4% in 2020 to 7.5% in 2021 but was lower than the 7.8% seen in 2019; babies from the Black ethnic group continued to be more likely than other groups to be preterm births.
- This is the first year that births registered outside of a marriage or civil partnership have outnumbered births registered within a marriage or civil partnership; there were 624,828 live births in 2021, of which 320,713 (51.3%) were registered to women outside of a marriage or civil partnership.
- The stillbirth rate in the 10% most deprived areas in England was 5.6 stillbirths per 1,000 births in 2021; in contrast, the stillbirth rate was lower in the 10% least deprived areas in England at 2.7 stillbirths per 1,000 births.

Delays in birth registrations because of the coronavirus pandemic have affected 2020 and 2021 data. See [Section 11: Measuring the data](#)

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2 . Birth characteristics

This bulletin provides information on different birth and parental characteristics, such as age of parents, birthweight, ethnic group and place of birth.

In this bulletin, we use a combination of final birth registrations data and notifications data linked to birth registrations data. This differs from the data used in our [Provisional births in England and Wales: 2021](#) article. More information can be found in our [User guide to birth statistics](#).

3 . Fertility rates

Today (19 January 2023) we have also published [revised 2021 fertility rates for England and Wales](#) calculated using the provisional 2021 mid-year population estimates.

These show that the total fertility rate (TFR) for England and Wales in 2021 was estimated to be 1.55 children per woman and the general fertility rate (GFR) was 54.1 births per 1,000 women. These are lower than our previously published TFR of 1.61 births per woman and GFR of 55.8 births per 1,000 women.

Revised age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for 2021 were also lower for all age groups of mothers compared with our previously published figures. The data show the same pattern with 30- to 34-year-olds remaining the age group with the highest rates, followed by 25- to 29-year-olds.

In line with the change seen for England and Wales, the TFRs for the majority (79.1%) of local authorities in England and Wales in 2021 are also lower compared with our previously published figures.

2021 fertility rates should not be compared with previous years until we have revised them based on the final 2012 to 2021 mid-year estimates, which will be available later in 2023. See [Section 11: Measuring the data](#).

4 . Age of parents

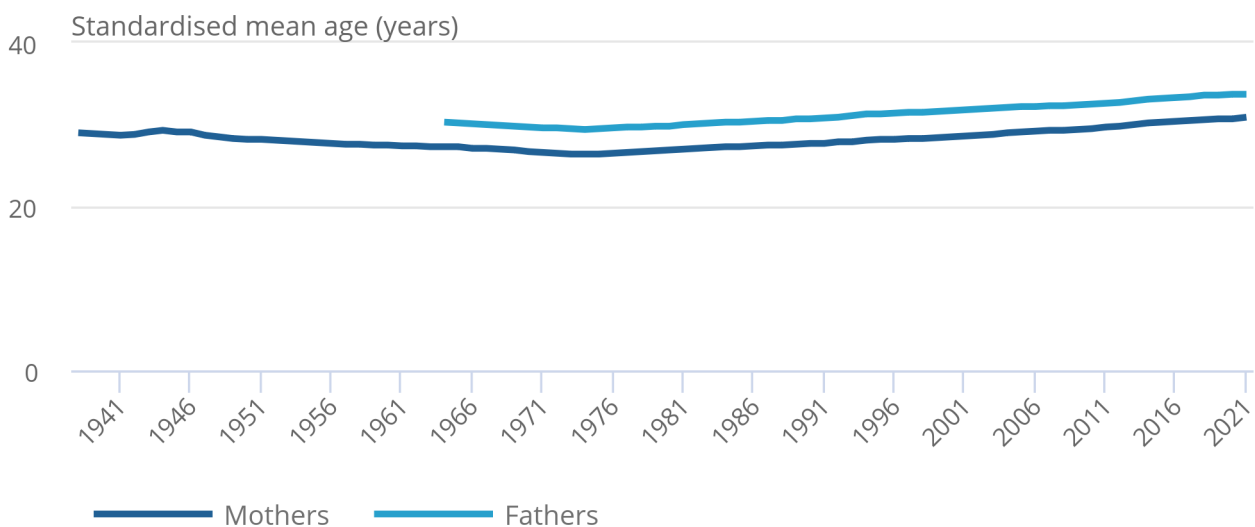
In 2021, the [standardised mean age](#) of mothers who gave birth increased to 30.9 years, in line with the overall trend of parenthood being delayed until older ages. The standardised mean age for fathers remained at 33.7 years (Figure 1). These figures are the highest since data collection began in 1938 for mothers and 1964 for fathers.

Figure 1: Average age of parents remains at record highs

Standardised mean age of mothers and fathers, England and Wales, 1938 to 2021

Figure 1: Average age of parents remains at record highs

Standardised mean age of mothers and fathers, England and Wales, 1938 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Electronic data on the standardised mean age of father are not available before 1964.
2. For births registered under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, 2008, the age of second parent has been included with age of father. See [Glossary](#) for more information.

Stillbirth rates vary by the age of mother. In 2021, all age groups saw an increase in stillbirth rates, except the 30- to 34-year age group, which has remained at 3.6 stillbirths per 1,000 births since 2017. We expect to see these year-on-year fluctuations in the data because of the smaller numbers of stillbirths by age of mother (Figure 2).

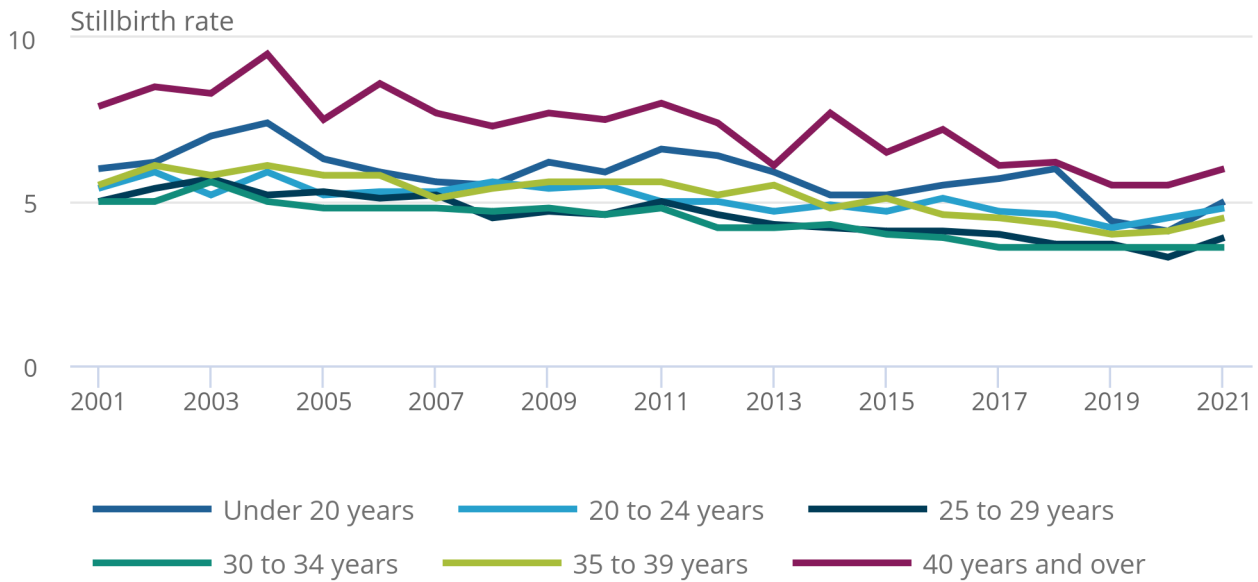
The highest stillbirth rates were seen in women aged 40 years and over at 6.0 stillbirths per 1,000 births, and women aged under 20 years at 5.0 stillbirths per 1,000 births (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Mothers aged 40 years and over continue to have the highest stillbirth rate

Stillbirth rates by age group of mother, England and Wales, 2001 to 2021

Figure 2: Mothers aged 40 years and over continue to have the highest stillbirth rate

Stillbirth rates by age group of mother, England and Wales, 2001 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

5 . Ethnicity

A preterm birth is a birth that takes place before 37 weeks' gestation. The overall percentage of preterm live births increased from 7.4% in 2020 to 7.5% in 2021, ending three years of consecutive decreases.

The percentage of preterm live births varied by ethnicity of the baby. Babies from the Black ethnic group have had the highest proportion of preterm births since data collection began in 2007. In 2021, 8.6% of live births in the Black ethnic group were preterm births. Within the Black ethnic group, Black Caribbean and Any other Black background ethnic groups had the highest percentages of preterm live births, at 10.2% and 9.1% respectively.

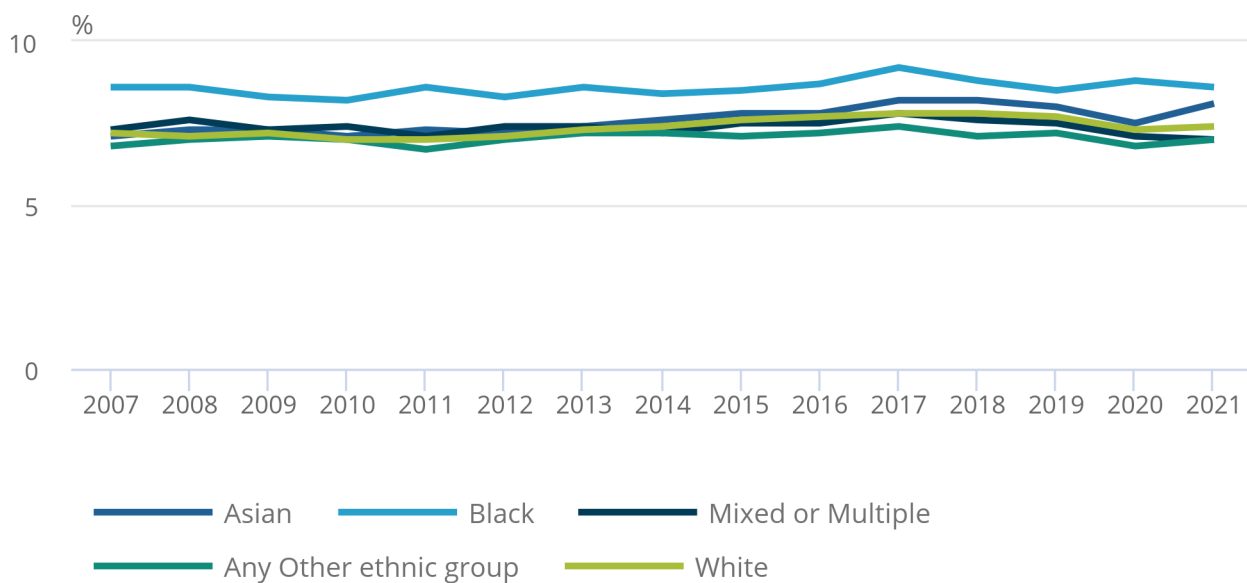
Between 2020 and 2021, the biggest percentage increase in preterm live births was in the Asian ethnic group, from 7.5% to 8.1% (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Babies from the Black ethnic group have had the highest proportion of preterm births since 2007

Percentage of preterm live births by ethnicity of the baby, England and Wales, 2007 to 2021

Figure 3: Babies from the Black ethnic group have had the highest proportion of preterm births since 2007

Percentage of preterm live births by ethnicity of the baby, England and Wales, 2007 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

Stillbirth rates also vary by ethnicity of the baby. Stillbirth rates have generally been decreasing across all ethnic groups in England and Wales since data collection began in 2007, although there have been fluctuations between individual years.

In 2021, stillbirth rates were reported to be higher across all ethnic groups compared with the previous year except for the Asian group (Figure 4). However, these differences may be because of annual fluctuations seen in the data because of the small numbers of stillbirths when broken down by ethnic group. We will continue to monitor stillbirth rates to understand if the increase seen for most ethnic groups in 2021 is a change in the overall decreasing trend.

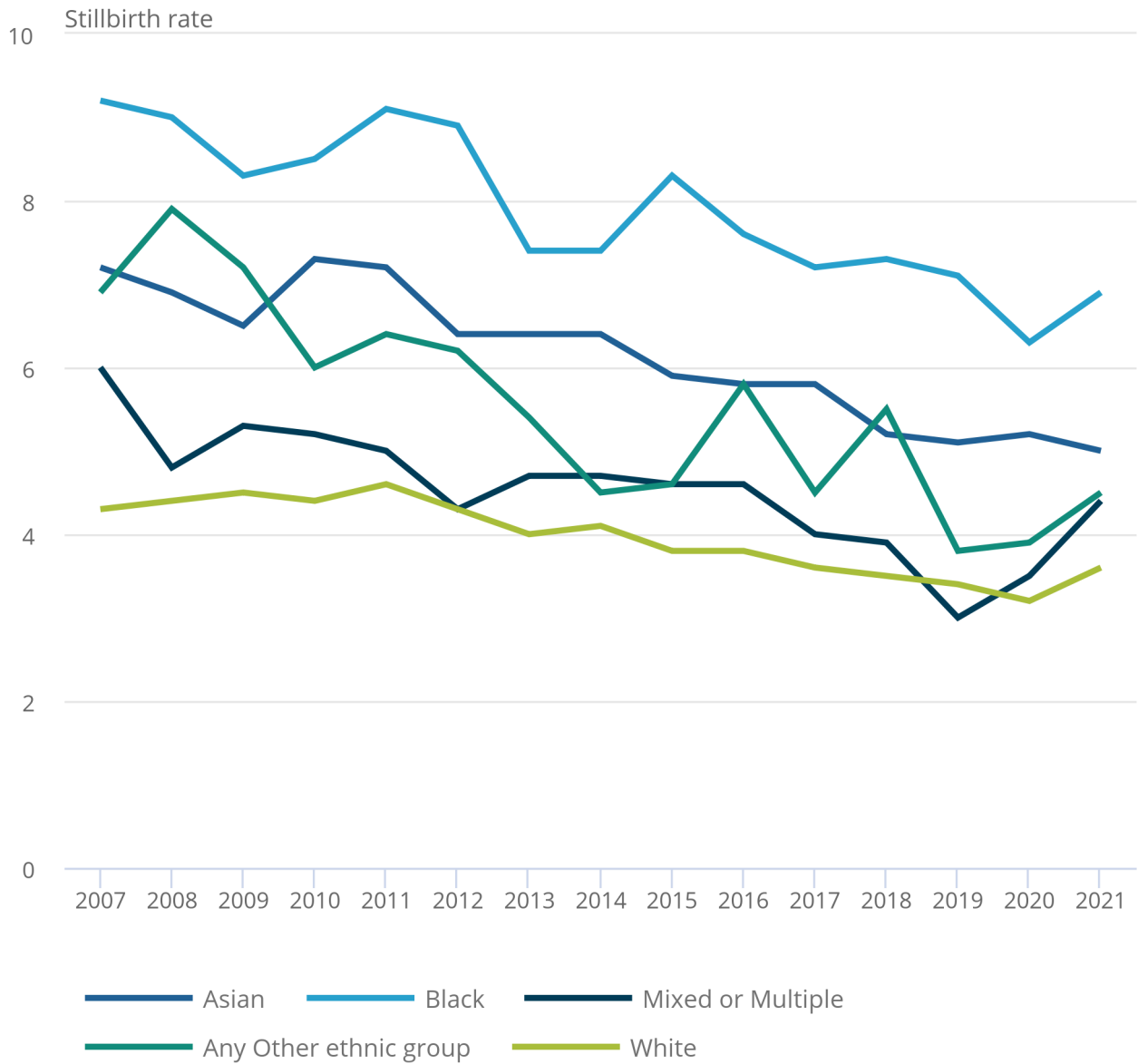
Babies from the Black ethnic group continue to have the highest stillbirth rate at 6.9 stillbirths per 1,000 births in 2021. Within this ethnic group, the Black African group had the highest stillbirth rate at 7.0 in 2021.

Figure 4: Babies from the Black ethnic group continue to have the highest stillbirth rate

Stillbirth rate by ethnicity of the baby, England and Wales, 2007 to 2021

Figure 4: Babies from the Black ethnic group continue to have the highest stillbirth rate

Stillbirth rate by ethnicity of the baby, England and Wales, 2007 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

6 . Day of birth

The most popular date of birth in 2021 was 23 September with 2,055 live births occurring and the second most popular was 7 October with 2,011 live births.

In 2021, October was the most popular month for births (8.9% of all live births), while the least popular month was February (7.4% of all live births).

Between the years 2001 and 2021, on average, 9 of the top 10 dates of births were towards the end of September and early October. During this period, 27 September was the most popular date for a baby to be born with 1,993 live births on this day on average. The least popular date of birth between 2001 and 2021 was Boxing Day with 1,345 live births followed by Christmas Day with 1,416 live births (Figure 5).

Figure 5: September is the most popular month for births

Average daily live births, England and Wales, 2001 to 2021

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

7 . Registration type

There were 624,828 live births in 2021, of which 51.3% (320,713) were registered to women outside of a marriage or a civil partnership, increasing from 47.2% in 2011.

This is the first year that the number of live births registered outside of a marriage or civil partnership exceeded the number of births registered within a marriage or civil partnership since records began in 1845. This follows the long-term trend of declining marriage rates and increasing numbers of cohabiting couples seen in recent decades. However, caution should be taken in interpreting these numbers as we do not yet know the full impact of the pandemic on [marriage](#) and [civil partnership](#) statistics.

Similarly, the percentage of births registered to cohabiting parents has increased, with 36.5% of all births being registered to cohabiting parents in 2021, compared with 31.2% in 2011 (Figure 6).

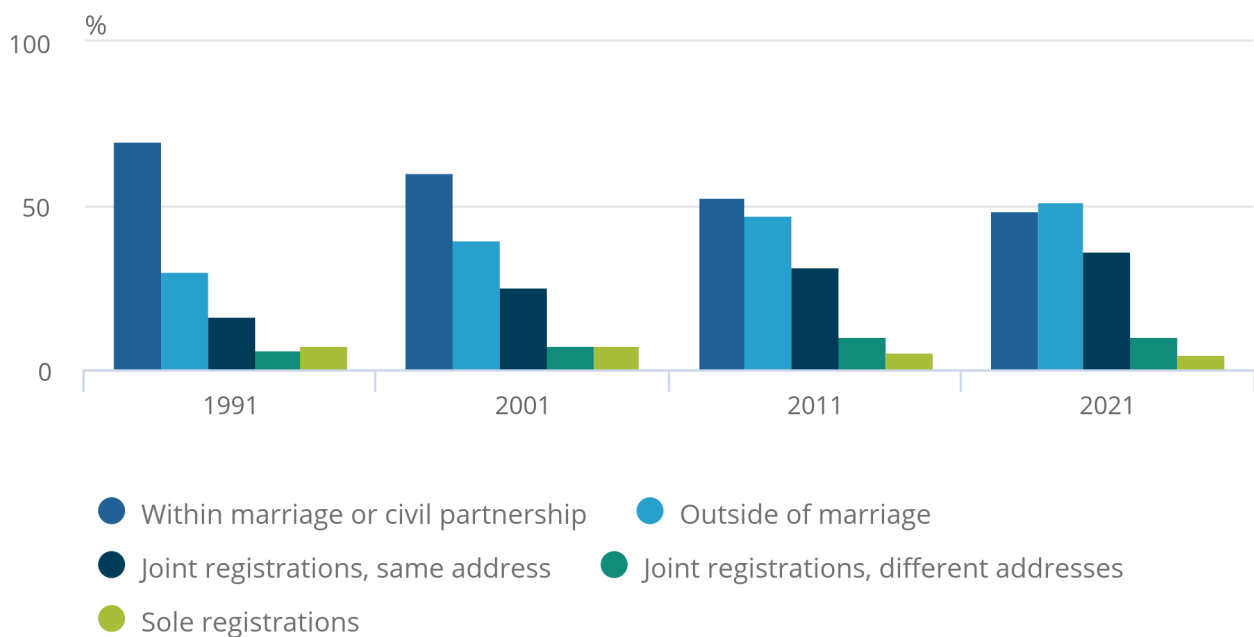
The percentage of births registered outside of a marriage or civil partnership varies by age of mother. In 2021, mothers aged 30 years and over who gave birth were almost twice as likely to be in a marriage or civil partnership, compared with mothers aged under 30 years (60.5% and 31.2% respectively).

Figure 6: Births are increasingly registered outside of marriage or civil partnership

Percentage of live births by registration type, England and Wales, 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021

Figure 6: Births are increasingly registered outside of marriage or civil partnership

Percentage of live births by registration type, England and Wales, 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum because of rounding.
2. Information about whether a couple jointly registering a birth were living at the same address is only available back to 1986.

8 . Deprivation

Deprivation within areas in England and Wales is measured using the [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\)](#).

In England, there were more live births to mothers resident in the 10% most deprived areas of the country in 2021 (12.8%, a decrease from 13.3% in 2020). In comparison, 7.7% of all live births were to mothers resident in the 10% least deprived areas of the country, a slight increase from 7.2% in 2020. The differences between the 10% most and 10% least deprived areas have been broadly consistent since 2015 when we first published live births by IMD.

Births in Wales followed a similar pattern with 12.7% of all live births to mothers resident in the 10% most deprived parts of the country in 2021 and 8.0% of all live births to mothers resident in the 10% least deprived areas.

Stillbirth rates have been higher for mothers resident in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived areas consistently with few fluctuations since 2015.

In 2021, there were 5.6 stillbirths per 1,000 births in the 10% most deprived areas in England, increasing from 5.2 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2020. In the 10% least deprived areas in England, the stillbirth rate was 2.7 stillbirths per 1,000 births. This is a small decrease from 2.8 stillbirths in 2020. These annual changes may be because of fluctuations in the data because of the smaller numbers of stillbirths when broken down by IMD.

Stillbirth rates for Wales can be found in our [published datasets](#).

9 . Births data

[Birth characteristics](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

Annual live births in England and Wales by sex, birthweight, gestational age, ethnicity and month, maternities by place of birth and with multiple births, and stillbirths by age of parents and calendar quarter.

[Births by parents' characteristics](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

Annual live births in England and Wales by age of mother and father, type of registration, median interval between births, number of previous live-born children and National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC).

[Births in England and Wales: summary tables](#)

Dataset | Released 19 January 2023

Live births and stillbirths annual summary statistics, by sex, age of mother, whether inside marriage or civil partnership, percentage of non-UK-born mothers, birth rates and births by mothers' area of usual residence.

Filter these data

[Live births in England and Wales: birth rates down to local authority areas \(2013 onwards\)](#)

[Live births in England and Wales by sex and characteristics of mother: national and regional \(2013 onwards\)](#)

[Live births in England and Wales by characteristics of mother and father \(2013 onwards\)](#)

[Live births in England and Wales down to local authority local area \(2013 onwards\)](#)

[Live births in England and Wales for small geographic areas \(2013 onwards\)](#)

10 . Glossary

Age-specific fertility rate (ASFR)

The number of live births to mothers of a particular age per 1,000 women of that age in the population. Useful for comparing fertility of women at different ages or women of the same age in different populations. The rates for women under 20 years and 40 years and over are based on the female population aged 15 to 19 years and 40 to 44 years respectively. Age-specific fertility rates for 1981 are based on a 10% sample because of the late submission of some birth registrations caused by a registrars' strike. The population estimates used to calculate fertility rates from 1938 to 1980 are rounded to the nearest hundred and are therefore of a slightly lower level of accuracy than the fertility rates for 1981 onwards.

General fertility rate (GFR)

The number of live births in a year per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years. Measure of current fertility levels.

Gestational age

A measure of how far along a pregnancy is in weeks at the time of birth.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, 2008

For births registered under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, 2008, the age of second parent has been included with age of father and therefore included in the production of the standardised mean age of father. Given the relatively small number of births registered to same-sex couples, this has a negligible impact on the statistics.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

Deprivation within areas in England and Wales is measured using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). There are different measures for England and Wales, which are not comparable. IMD is measured in deciles ranging from 1 to 10, with 1 being the most deprived and 10 being the least deprived.

Live birth

A baby showing signs of life at birth.

Notification

A document completed by the doctor or midwife present at the birth. It includes information that is not on the birth registration like birthweight, gestation length and ethnicity of the baby. We link birth registrations and birth notifications to produce some of our statistics as it enables us to provide breakdowns by these factors. The registrar also receives birth notification information so they can check whether all births have been registered or not.

Preterm birth

A preterm birth is a birth that takes place before 37 weeks' gestation. We use the following [classifications of preterm](#) live births:

- extremely preterm (under 28 weeks)
- very preterm (28 to 31 weeks)
- moderate preterm (32 to 36 weeks)

Standardised mean age

The standardised mean (average) age (for example, at birth or marriage) is a measure that eliminates the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age and therefore enables trends over time to be analysed. Standardised means are calculated using rates per 1,000 female population by single year of age of mother.

Stillbirth

A stillbirth is a baby born after 24 or more weeks completed gestation and which did not, at any time, breathe or show signs of life. On 1 October 1992 the [Still-Birth \(Definition\) Act 1992](#) came into force, altering the definition of a stillbirth to 24 or more weeks completed gestation, instead of 28 or more weeks completed gestation. The stillbirth rate is defined as the number of stillbirths per 1,000 live births and stillbirths.

Total fertility rate (TFR)

TFR is the average number of live children that a group of women would have if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates for the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lifespan. It is a better measure of trends than the number of livebirths, since it accounts for the size and age structure of the female population of childbearing age. The rate provides a timely measure of fertility levels and can be affected by changes in the [timing of childbearing](#), [completed family size](#) and the population structure.

11 . Measuring the data

Birth statistics represent births that occur and are then registered in England and Wales. Figures are derived from information recorded when live births and stillbirths are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement. These data represent the most complete data source available.

In England and Wales, the registration of births is a service carried out by the Local Registration Service in partnership with the General Register Office (GRO).

When a birth is registered, birth registration data are linked to NHS birth notification to obtain birthweight data.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) undertakes further linkage of birth registration to NHS birth notification to obtain the age of the mother where this was missing on the birth registration and to enable the analysis of characteristics such as ethnicity of the baby and gestation of live births.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Births QMI](#).

Coronavirus and birth statistics

Delays in birth registrations because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected 2020 and 2021 data; in normal circumstances, births should be registered within 42 days and our annual data extract only includes births registered before 25 February.

Birth registration services in England and Wales were temporarily suspended in March 2020. From June 2020 registration services restarted where it was safe to do so. In 2020, 42% of registrations came in after 42 days (the usual legal limit) and in 2021, 26% came in after 42 days. Therefore, we decided to include all births registered up to 12 August 2021 in the 2020 dataset and all births up to 15 May 2022 in the 2021 dataset, to ensure that our birth statistics are as complete as possible and comparable with previous years. For more information, please see our [Births in England and Wales explained: 2020 article](#) and our [User guide to birth statistics](#).

Population estimates revisions

In this release fertility rates for 2021 were calculated using provisional mid-year 2021 population estimates. These were the latest population estimates available at the time of production and are Census 2021-based estimates. The 2021 mid-year estimates are due to be revised again in 2023 [along with the back series to 2012 in line with normal practice following the decennial Census](#). Care should be taken when comparing rates from 2021 with previous years until the back series has been revised.

Mid-2021 population estimates were not available at the time of publication of the [Births in England and Wales: summary tables](#) (9 August 2022) and so fertility rates were calculated using 2018-based population projections. We have [now revised the 2021 fertility rates using the provisional 2021 mid-year estimates](#) (19 January 2023). Care should be taken when comparing rates from 2021 with previous years until the back series has been revised. We will update time series data tables in our next releases when the revised 2012 to 2021 mid-year estimates are available.

Stillbirths by cause of death

From the 2021 data year the hierarchical classification used to classify ONS cause of death groups for stillbirth and neonatal deaths has been updated to align with changes to the cause of death coding software. As such ONS cause groups from 2021 onwards are not directly comparable with 2014 to 2020 data. More information on ONS cause groups can be found in our [User guide to child and infant mortality statistics](#) and [User guide to birth statistics](#).

12 . Strengths and limitations

Our [User guide to birth statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to conceptions, and it includes a [glossary of terms](#).

National Statistics status for Births in England and Wales

[National Statistics](#) status means that our statistics meet the highest standard of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

Date of [most recent full assessment: September 2011](#).

Most recent [compliance check that confirms National Statistics status: September 2011](#).

The improvements we have made since the last review include:

- revisions to the way statistics are produced are explained in the [User guide](#), detailing the year the change took place and reason why
- in cases where corrections were implemented, they were accompanied by explanations of the change and the reasons why
- where applicable, we added background information into our [User guide](#) and [QMI](#) to inform the user of the differences in methods between the UK countries and the reasons underlying these differences
- [following a consultation on proposed changes to statistics](#), we made changes in 2018 to the way that birth statistics are published; five [explorable datasets](#) are now released in July alongside the first release of annual births data, which means more detailed birth data (including small area geographies) are now available in a timelier manner
- following [guidance from the Government Statistical Service \(GSS\)](#) to improve digital accessibility of statistical spreadsheets, our published datasets from the 2020 and 2021 data year incorporate this guidance

13 . Related links

[Births in England and Wales: 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 August 2022

Annual live births, stillbirths and the intensity of childbearing, measured by the total fertility rate.

[Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales: 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 August 2022

Annual statistics on live births including countries of birth for non-UK-born mothers and fathers.

[Provisional births in England and Wales: 2021](#)

Article | Released 22 March 2022

Provisional analysis of births occurring between January and December 2021 in England and Wales using NHS birth notifications.

[Births and infant mortality by ethnicity in England and Wales: 2007 to 2019](#)

Article | Released 26 May 2021

Live births, stillbirths, infant deaths by ethnicity of the baby occurring annually in England and Wales.

[Baby names in England and Wales: 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 October 2022

Most popular first names for baby boys and girls in 2021 using birth registration data.

[Births in Scotland](#)

Web page | Updated as new data become available

National Records of Scotland's (NRS's) statistics on births.

[Births in Northern Ireland](#)

Web page | Updated as new data become available

Births statistics from 1887 onwards and baby names statistics from 1997 onwards for Northern Ireland.

14 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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