

Statistical bulletin

Births in England and Wales: 2017

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



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1 . Main points

- There were 679,106 live births in England and Wales in 2017, a decrease of 2.5% from 2016 and the lowest number of live births since 2006.
- In 2017, the total fertility rate (TFR) declined for the fifth consecutive year to 1.76 children per woman, from 1.81 in 2016.
- Fertility rates decreased for every age group in 2017, except for women aged 40 years and over, where the rate increased by 1.3% to 16.1 births per 1,000 women in that age group, reaching the highest level since 1949.
- The average age of mothers in 2017 increased to 30.5 years, from 30.4 years in 2016 and 26.4 years in 1975.
- In 2017, just over half of all live births were born to parents who were married or in a civil partnership (51.9%); however, 67.3% of live births born outside of marriage or civil partnership were to parents who lived together.
- 28.4% of live births in 2017 were to mothers born outside the UK, following a gradual rise from 11.6% in 1990.
- The stillbirth rate decreased to 4.2 per 1,000 total births in 2017, the lowest rate on record with figures available back to 1927; in the last decade since 2007 the stillbirth rate has decreased by 19.2%.

2 . Statistician's comment

"The stillbirth rate has dropped to a record low, declining each year since 2011. It is a step towards achieving a government ambition to reduce the rate of stillbirths by introducing new maternity strategies while ensuring the best and safest care.

"Meanwhile, birth rates for live births have decreased for all women except those aged 40 years and over where the birth rate has continued to rise, following a trend seen for the last 40 years. Despite this, the proportion of women aged 40 years and over having a baby still remains below that seen in the 1940s."

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics Follow Vital Statistics Outputs Branch on Twitter [@StatsLiz](#).

3 . Things you need to know about this release

Important information for interpreting these birth statistics:

- birth statistics represent births which occurred in England and Wales in the calendar year, but include a very small number of late registrations from the previous year
- figures are compiled from information supplied when births are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement

4 . The number of live births and the total fertility rate decreased in 2017

In 2017 there were 679,106 live births in England and Wales, a decrease of 2.5% compared with 696,271 in 2016. This is the largest annual percentage decrease since the number of live births declined by 4.3% between 2012 and 2013 (Figure 1).

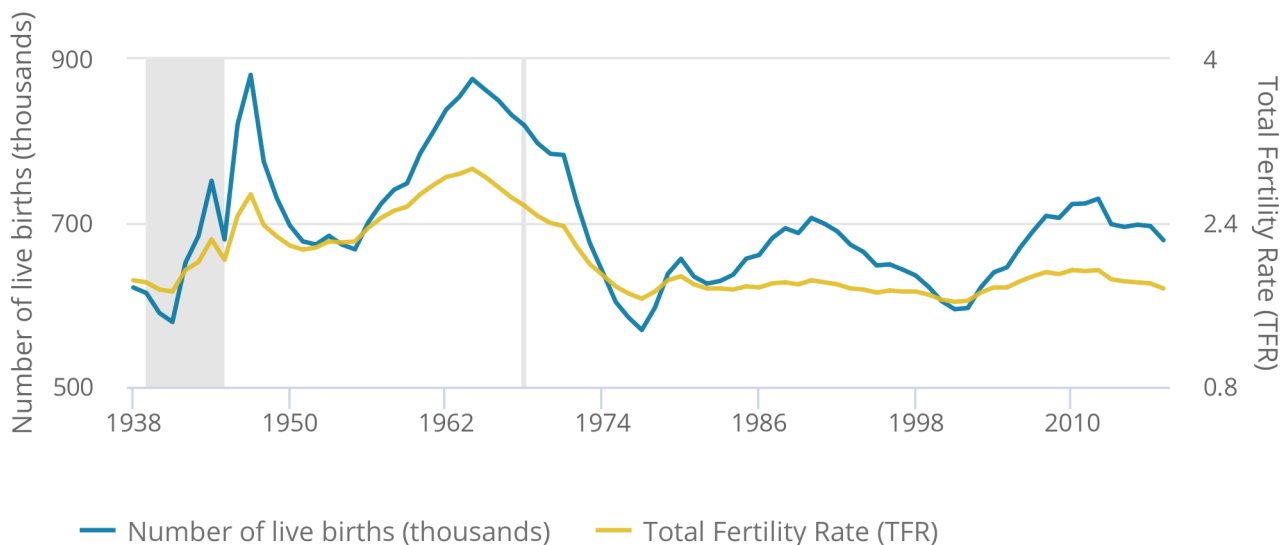
The total fertility rate (TFR) for England and Wales decreased in 2017 to an average of 1.76 children per woman from 1.81 in 2016, declining for the fifth consecutive year, from 1.94 in 2012 (Figure 1). The TFR provides a timely measure of fertility levels; it can be affected by changes in the timing of childbearing, [completed family size](#) and the population structure.

Figure 1: Number of live births and total fertility rate (TFR), 1938 to 2017

England and Wales

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England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year.
2. The total fertility rate is the average number of live children that a group of women would bear if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates of the calendar year throughout their childbearing lifespan.

5 . Fertility rates for women aged 40 years and over continued their long-term rise

In 2017, fertility rates for women aged 40 years and over increased by 1.3% compared with 2016, continuing the long-term rise recorded since the late-1970s. The fertility rate for this age group is at its highest level since 1949, with 16.1 births per 1,000 women aged 40 years and over. For the third consecutive year the fertility rate for women aged 40 years and over exceeded the rate for women aged under 20 years; this pattern was last recorded in 1947.

Women aged 30 to 34 years have had the highest fertility rate of any age group since 2004; prior to this, women aged 25 to 29 years had the highest fertility, indicating that women are progressively delaying childbearing to older ages. This may be due to several factors such as increased female participation in higher education and the labour force, the increasing importance of a career, the rising costs of childbearing, labour market uncertainty and housing factors. The rising fertility rates at older ages have affected the average age of mothers, which has risen from 26.4 years in 1975, reaching 30.5 years in 2017.

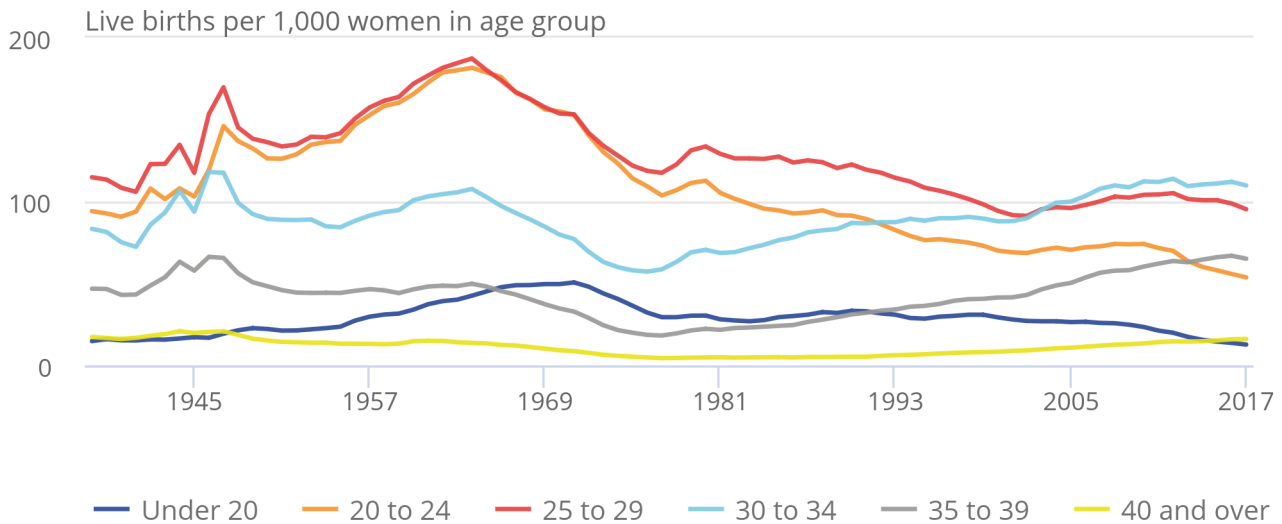
Fertility rates for women aged under 40 years decreased in 2017 compared with 2016 (Figure 2). The largest percentage decrease in fertility rates in 2017 was for women aged under 20 years (7.3%), followed by women aged 20 to 24 years (3.8%).

Figure 2: Age-specific fertility rates, 1938 to 2017

England and Wales

Figure 2: Age-specific fertility rates, 1938 to 2017

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year.
2. 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.
3. Age-specific fertility rates for 1981 are based on a 10% sample due to the late submission of some birth registrations due to a registrars' strike.
4. 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 to 2017.

6 . Two-thirds of babies born outside marriage or civil partnership had parents who live together

The percentage of live births outside marriage or civil partnership increased in 2017 to 48.1% from 47.6% in 2016. Many of the babies born outside of marriage or civil partnership had parents who live together. Since 1998, over 60% of all births registered outside marriage or civil partnership each year have been to a cohabiting couple; in 2017 the figure was 67.3%. This is consistent with increases in the number of couples cohabiting rather than entering into marriage or civil partnership ([Families and Households](#) provides further information).

7 . The percentage of live births to non-UK-born mothers continued to increase

The percentage of live births in England and Wales to mothers born outside the UK continued to rise in 2017, reaching 28.4%; this compares with 28.2% in 2016 and is the highest level on record (figures available back to 1969). The percentage of live births to non-UK-born mothers has increased gradually every year since 1990, when it was 11.6%.

In recent years, the percentage of births to women born outside the UK has been higher than the percentage of the female population of childbearing age born outside the UK. There are two reasons for this:

- [fertility levels are generally higher among foreign-born women](#), therefore they are likely to have more babies than UK-born women
- the populations of foreign-born and UK-born females at reproductive age have different age structures, with a higher proportion of foreign-born women being aged from 25 to 34 years, where fertility is highest

8 . Fertility rates varied considerably between areas

In 2017, the region of England with the highest total fertility rate (TFR) was the East, with 1.86 children per woman. The North East had the lowest TFR, with 1.64 children per woman. Table 1 details the local authorities in England and Wales with the highest and lowest TFRs in 2017.

Table 1: Local authorities with the highest and lowest total fertility rate in 2017, England and Wales

	England	Wales
Local authority with the highest TFR	Barking and Dagenham (2.37)	Denbighshire (2.01)
Local authority with the lowest TFR	Camden (1.17)	Cardiff (1.50)

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year.
2. The total fertility rate is the average number of live children that a group of women would bear if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates of the calendar year throughout their childbearing lifespan.

Figure 3: Total fertility rate (TFR) by local authority district, 2001 to 2017

England and Wales

Fertility rates can vary considerably between subnational areas for a wide variety of reasons. These include variations in the composition of the population living in each area and social, economic and cultural differences.

For example:

- a large student population within a local authority often reduces overall fertility in that area, as students in higher education tend to have below average fertility
- women born in certain countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and African countries tend to have above average fertility
- fertility rates for some local authorities are based on relatively small populations – such calculations are often subject to random fluctuations and are consequently less robust

9 . The number of live births in the UK decreased

The provisional number of live births in the UK in 2017 was 755,066; a decrease of 2.6% compared with 2016.

In 2017, the number of live births decreased by 3.0% in Scotland and 4.1% in Northern Ireland (provisional). Further birth statistics for the UK and its constituent countries will be published in our [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#) in October to November 2018.

10 . The lowest stillbirth rate on record

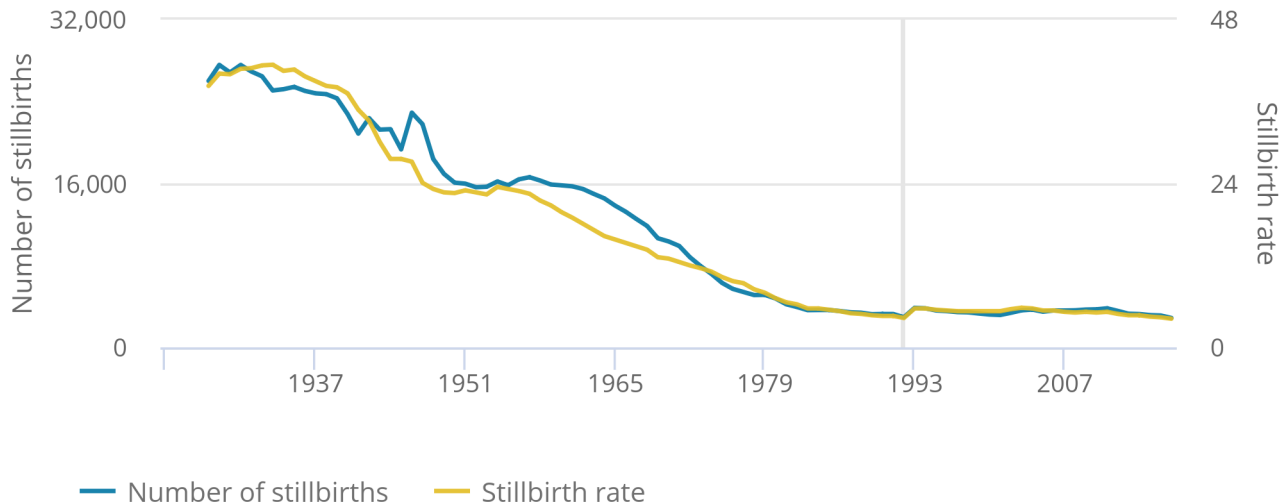
The number of stillbirths in England and Wales fell by 7.7% to 2,873 in 2017, from 3,112 in 2016. The stillbirth rate considers the total number of births (live and stillbirths), so provides a more accurate indication of trends than just analysing the number of stillbirths over time. In 2017, the stillbirth rate for England and Wales fell from 4.4 to 4.2 per 1,000 total births, the lowest rate on record (figures available back to 1927).

Figure 4: Stillbirth numbers and rates, 1927 to 2017

England and Wales

Figure 4: Stillbirth numbers and rates, 1927 to 2017

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births and stillbirths occurring in each calendar year.
2. The stillbirth rate shows the number of stillbirths per 1,000 total births (live births and stillbirths).
3. On 1 October 1992 the Stillbirth (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. Figures for stillbirths from 1993 are thus not fully comparable with those for previous years.

In England, the stillbirth rate in 2017 was 4.1 per 1,000 total births, down from 4.3 in 2016. There has been a general downward trend in the stillbirth rate over the last 10 years with a decrease of 21.2% since 2007.

In Wales, the stillbirth rate in 2017 was 4.7 per 1,000 total births, down from 5.0 in 2016. The small number of stillbirths in Wales means the rate can fluctuate between years.

11 . Changes to annual birth statistics

Following our [consultation on changes to birth statistics](#), which ran between 19 July 2017 and 26 September 2017, alterations are being made to published birth statistics for the 2017 data year onwards. [Explorable datasets](#) are now available in NOMIS providing detailed birth statistics for 2013 to 2017; these datasets will be updated annually alongside the first release of annual data in July. Given the availability of these explorable datasets, some changes are also being made to our published datasets; these changes were outlined in the [consultation response](#) published on 4 December 2017. As a result, we are now publishing more detailed birth statistics for England and Wales than previously whilst also improving the timeliness of more detailed birth statistics. A lookup showing the tables that used to be published and where data can now be found is contained within the [dataset](#) for this release.

12 . Links to related statistics

More detailed statistics on [births](#) and [deaths](#) in England and Wales are available.

Five [explorable datasets](#) providing more detailed birth statistics are available alongside this first release of annual births data. These explorable datasets include statistics based on characteristics of mother and father, as well as live birth figures for small geographical areas such as lower layer super output areas and wards. These explorable datasets have been specially designed to protect the confidentiality of individuals.

The number of births, birth rates and mean age of mother for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#). Figures for 2017 are due to be published October to November 2018.

[How popular is your birthday?](#) uses birth data from 1994 to 2014 to determine the most popular birthdays.

Eurostat data has been compiled for [Live birth rates to women aged under 18 and under 20 years in EU28 countries, 2006, 2015 and 2016](#).

Possible reasons for the rising fertility rate between 2001 and 2012 are discussed in [Why has the fertility rate risen over the last decade in England and Wales?](#)

[Childbearing of UK and non-UK born women living in the UK, 2011 Census data](#) examines fertility rates for foreign-born women within England and Wales (around 150 different countries analysed).

Further 2017 birth statistics will be published later in 2018; see the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) for more details.

Special extracts and tabulations of birth data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [ONS charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch by email to vsob@ons.gov.uk or telephone on +44 (0)1329 444110. [User requested data](#) will be published.

13 . Quality and methodology

This is the first time that annual birth statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2017. This release provides summary figures; more detailed data on live births in England and Wales in 2017 have also been published in [five explorable datasets](#). Further birth statistics are published in themed packages between August and December.

Birth statistics are used for planning maternity services, to inform policy decisions and resource allocation, for example, deciding numbers of school places required. They also enable the analysis of social and demographic trends.

The [Births Quality and Methodology Information](#) contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output, including the accuracy of the data

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

There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between UK countries. However, there are some differences, although these are believed to have a negligible impact on the comparability of the statistics. These differences are outlined in our [Births Quality and Methodology Information](#).

The [Revisions policy for population statistics \(including birth statistics\)](#) is available.

The total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of live children that a group of women would each have if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates of the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lives. It provides a timely measure of the current intensity of childbearing. Our [User guide to birth statistics](#) provides further information.

The average age of mother has been standardised to eliminate the impact of changes in the distribution of the population by age, enabling analysis of trends over time. The figure is therefore calculated using fertility rates per 1,000 female population by single year of age.

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.