

Statistical bulletin

Live Births in England and Wales by Characteristics of Mother 1: 2012

The age and living arrangements of mothers based on birth registration data.



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1. Main findings

- In 2012, nearly half (49%) of all live births were to mothers aged 30 and over
- In 2012, nearly two-thirds (65%) of fathers were aged 30 and over (excluding births registered solely by the mother)
- In 2012, the standardised average age of mothers for all births was 29.8 years
- In 2012, for first births the standardised average age of mothers was 28.1 years
- In 2012, 84% of babies were registered by parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting

2. Summary

This bulletin presents statistics on live births in England and Wales in 2012 by characteristics of the mother. In particular, it provides birth statistics by age of mother, type of registration (within marriage/civil partnership, joint registration or sole registration), and average (mean) age of mother for all births and first births.

Many of the key summary figures included in this release have been published previously by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is however the first time that birth statistics for 2012 have been published by registration type (including a breakdown by age of mother and father), single year of age of mother and age of father. Birth statistics for 2012 showing the average age of mother by birth order are also released for the first time.

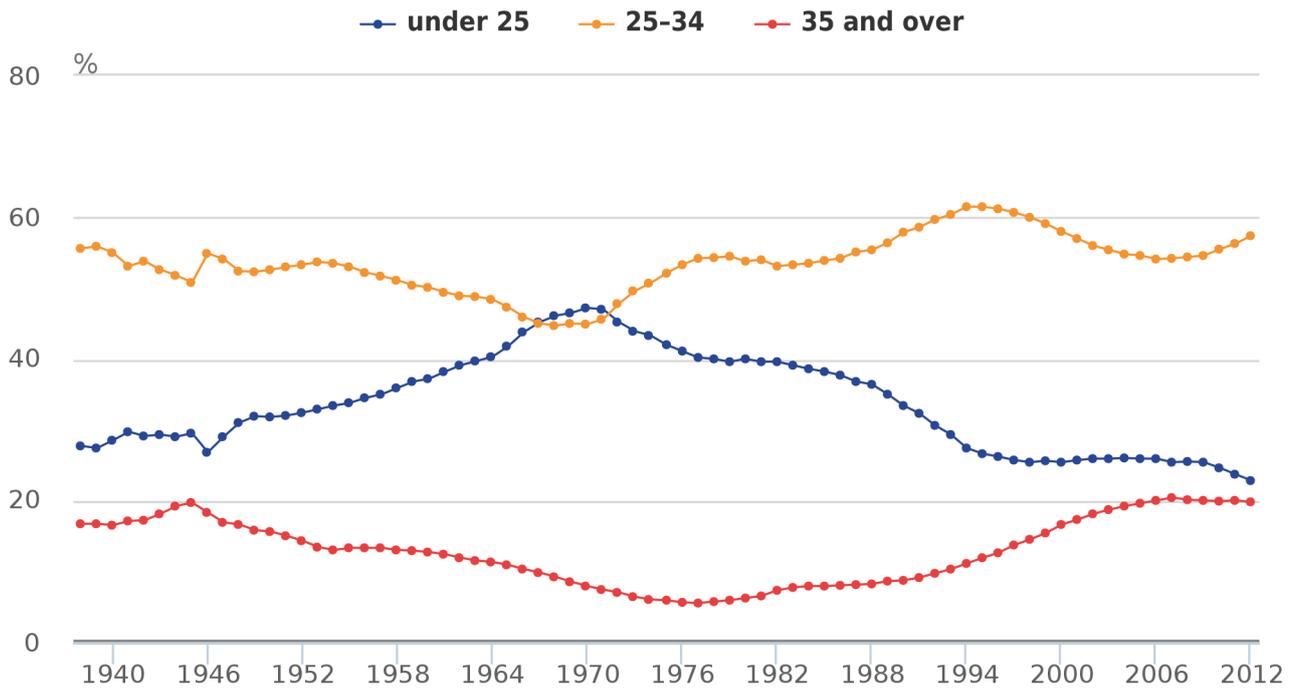
3. Timing of childbearing

Babies born in England and Wales in 2012 were most likely to have a mother aged 25-34, with over a half (57%) of mothers in this age group. A further 23% of babies were born to younger mothers, aged under 25, while a fifth (20%) had mothers aged 35 and over at the time of birth.

In 2012 the number of births to mothers aged 25-34 was more than double the number to mothers aged under 25, this trend has been recorded every year since 1993 (Figure 1). In contrast, between 1967 and 1971 births to mothers aged under 25 exceeded births to mothers aged 25-34.

Figure 1: Live births by age group of mother, 1938-2012

England and Wales

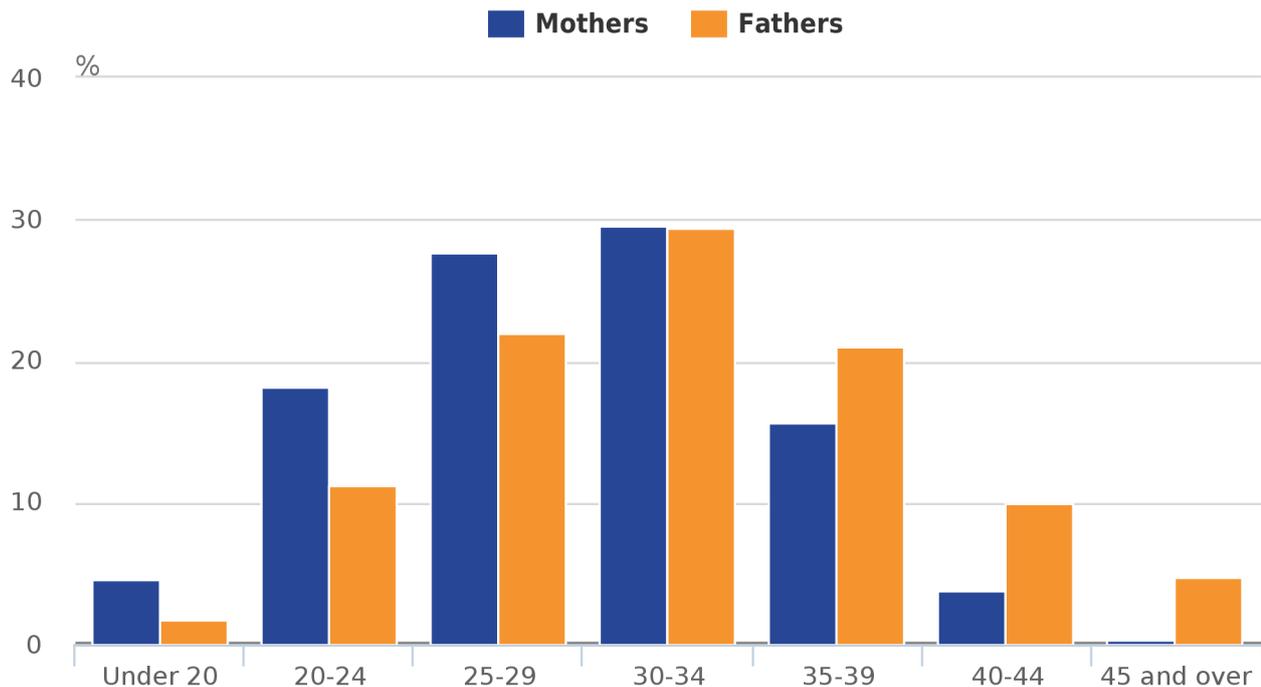


Source: Office for National Statistics

Fathers tend to be older than mothers (Figure 2). Nearly half of all babies born in 2012 (49%) had mothers aged 30 and over, but nearly two-thirds (65% of babies) had fathers aged 30 and over (sole registered births, where the father's information is not available, have been excluded). The percentage of fathers aged 30 and over has remained relatively unchanged over the last decade (66% of babies were fathered by men in this age group in 2002).

Figure 2: Live births by age group of mother and father, 2012

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

In 2012 the standardised average (mean) age of all mothers giving birth in England and Wales was 29.8 years, a small increase compared with 29.7 years in 2011 (see background note 6 for more information).

Between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s, the average age of mother decreased by just under three years (29.3 years in 1944 to 26.4 years in 1973). Since 1973 the average age of mother has generally increased. The overall rise since 1973 reflects the increasing numbers of women who have been delaying childbearing to later ages. Possible influences include; increased participation in higher education, increased female participation in the labour force, the increasing importance of a career, the rising opportunity costs of childbearing, labour market uncertainty, housing factors and instability of partnerships ([Jefferies, 2008 \(297 Kb Pdf\)](#); [Ní Bhrolcháin, et al., 2012](#)).

These figures refer to all births; however, the standardised average age of women having a first birth in 2012 was estimated to be 28.1 years of age, compared with 27.9 in 2011 and 26.8 in 2002 (see background note 7). Changes in the average age of mother for first births since 1940 mirror changes in the average age of all mothers.

4. Partnership status of parents

Marriage or civil partnership (see background note 5) remains the most common family setting for births in England and Wales as a whole despite the steady fall in the percentage of births registered to married couples since the 1960s. In 2012 just over half of births occurred within marriage or civil partnership (53%) compared with 59% in 2002 and 93% in 1962.

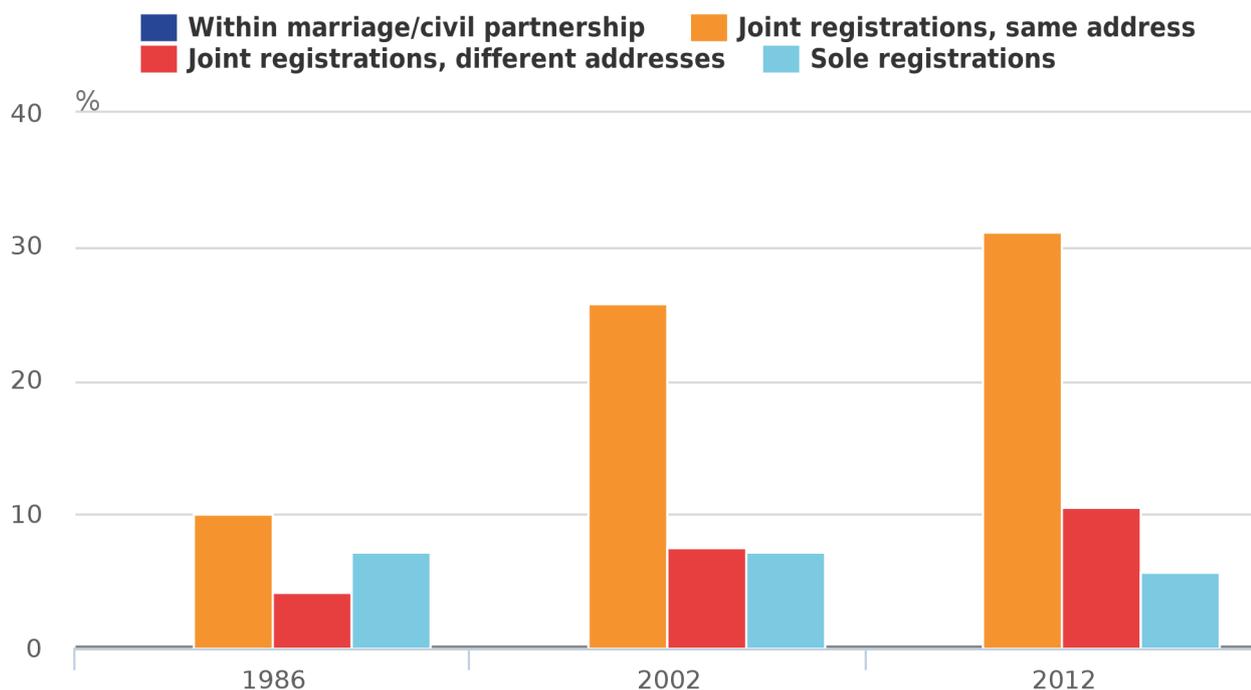
The percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership (47% in 2012) varies considerably by age. Almost all women (96%) aged under 20 who gave birth in 2012 were not married or in civil partnership. In contrast, at ages 30-34 and 35-39 the majority of women giving birth were either married or in a civil partnership, with only 31% of births outside marriage/civil partnership for each, the lowest percentage across all the age groups.

In 2012, the percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership was higher for all age groups compared with 2002.

Births outside marriage or civil partnership can be registered jointly by both the mother and father/second parent (see background note 5), or solely by the mother. Where the birth is jointly registered and the parents give the same address, it can be inferred that they are cohabiting (couples who are not married but living together). The proportion of births registered to cohabiting parents has increased in recent years (Figure 3) but has remained unchanged since 2010 at 31% of all births, compared with 26% in 2002 and 10% in 1986 (the first year figures for cohabiting parents are available). This trend is consistent with increases in the number of couples cohabiting rather than entering into marriage or civil partnership (for further information, see [Statistics on Families and Households](#)). In contrast, the percentage of births registered solely by the mother has fallen slightly over the last ten years to 5.7% in 2012 from 7.2% in 2002. In 1986 7.2% of births were registered by the mother alone.

Figure 3: Live birth by type of registration, 1986, 2002 and 2012

England and Wales



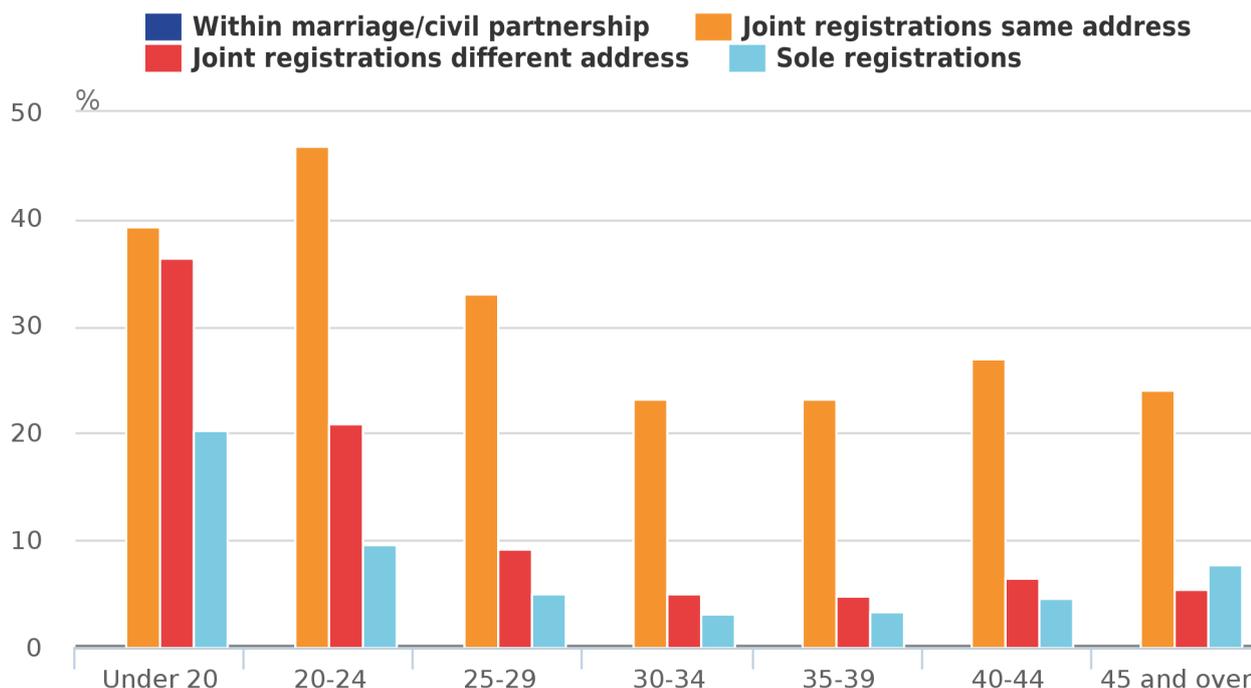
Source: Office for National Statistics

Overall, 84% of births in 2012 were to parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting. Of the remainder, a further 11% of births were registered jointly by parents living at separate addresses, while only 5.7% were registered by the mother alone.

Births to mothers aged under 25 were most likely to be jointly registered by cohabiting parents, while for women aged 25-29 and older, marriage/civil partnership was the most common family setting for births, followed by cohabitation (Figure 4). The percentage of births which were either jointly registered by parents living at different addresses or solely registered by the mother was higher among women aged under 25 than among older mothers.

Figure 4: Live births by type of registration and mother's age group, 2012

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

[O'Leary et al. \(2010\) \(2.5 Mb Pdf\)](#) provides a more detailed analysis of births by registration type, 1991 to 2008.

5. Planned changes to birth statistics

During May 2012 changes were made to the Population Statistics Act 1938, which means that information on the number of previous children and whether previously married is now collected from all mothers at birth registration and not just from married women. This will have an impact on a number of tables and [proposals for changes \(66.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) to outputs for 2012 and 2013 data were outlined on the ONS website in July 2012. Feedback from users was invited. No feedback was received and so the outlined changes are being implemented.

Changes to the tables included within [Live Births by socio-economic status of father](#) have also been considered, including implementing [the combined method for deriving the National Statistics Socio-economic classification](#) (using the higher NS-SEC of both parents rather than the NS-SEC of the father). [A proposal for changes to outputs for 2012 data \(63.5 Kb Pdf\)](#) was published on the ONS website in February 2013. Feedback from users was invited. No feedback was received so the outlined changes will be implemented.

6. Users and uses of birth statistics

The Office for National Statistics uses birth statistics to:

- produce population estimates and population projections, both national and subnational
- quality assure census estimates
- report on social and demographic trends

The Department of Health (DH) is a key user of birth statistics. Data are used, for example, to plan maternity services, inform policy decisions and monitor child mortality. [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#) sets out the desired outcomes for public health and how these will be measured, this includes indicators related to births. Similar indicators are also included within the [NHS Outcomes Framework](#).

Other key users of the data are local authorities and other government departments for planning and resource allocation. For example, local authorities use birth statistics to decide how many school places will be needed in a given area. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) uses detailed birth statistics to feed into statistical models they use for pensions and benefits.

Other users include academics, demographers and health researchers who conduct research into trends and characteristics. Lobby groups use birth statistics to support their cause, for example, campaigns against school closures and midwife shortages. Special interest groups, such as Birth Choice UK, make the data available to enable comparisons between maternity units to help women choose where they might like to give birth. Retailers use births data to inform future demand. Organisations such as Eurostat and the United Nations (UN) use birth statistics for making international comparisons. The media also report on key trends and statistics.

7. Further information

More data on [live births in England and Wales by characteristics of mother \(525 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) (age of mother including average age by birth order and type of registration) are available on the ONS website. This also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these packages on the ONS website.

The 'Characteristics of mother 2' package will be published in December 2013/January 2014 (the release date can be found on the [Publication Hub](#)). This package will contain:

- fertility rates by marital status
- live births within marriage by age of mother and number of previous live-born children
- first live births within marriage by marriage duration

Further publication dates of detailed 2012 birth statistics are available on the [Publication Hub](#).

A quality and methodology information document for births provides information on statistical quality and the methods used to compile the data.

Further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to births is available in the [Births metadata \(439.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).

An [interactive mapping tool](#) which enables trends in fertility to be analysed at the local level is available. The tool will be updated in Winter 2013/14 to include revised rates for 2002-2010 which take account of the 2011 Census and rates for 2011 and 2012.

For births data for other UK countries please see the [latest birth statistics for Northern Ireland](#) and the [latest birth statistics for Scotland](#).

International comparisons of live birth rates are available in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#)

8. References

Jefferies J (2008), [Fertility Assumptions for the 2006-based national population projections \(297 Kb Pdf\)](#), Population Trends 131 pp 19–27, spring 2008.

Ni Bhrolcháin M and Beaujouan E (2012), [Fertility postponement is largely due to rising educational enrolment](#), Population Studies: A Journal of Demography.

Office for National Statistics: [Statistics on families and households, annual release](#).

O'Leary L, Natamba E, Jefferies J and Wilson B (2010), [Fertility and partnership status in the last two decades](#), Population Trends 140 pp 5-35.

9. Background notes

1. There were 729,674 live births in England and Wales in 2012, compared with 723,913 in 2011, a rise of 0.8%. The small rise in 2012 represents a continuation of the increasing numbers of live births recorded since a low in 2001. During this period the number of live births has risen by 23% from 594,634 in 2001 despite a small fall between 2008 and 2009.
2. Birth figures are based on births occurring in the data year, but incorporate a small number of late registrations from births occurring in the previous year. More information can be found in the [births metadata \(439.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).
3. There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between countries within the UK. 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 the [Quality and Methodology Information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) document for births.
4. Percentages reported in this bulletin may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
5. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 contained provisions enabling two females in a same sex couple to register a birth from 1 September 2009 onwards. Due to the small numbers of births registered to same sex couples, births registered within a civil partnership are included with births registered within marriage. Births registered by a same sex couple outside of a civil partnership have been included with births registered outside marriage. The impact on 2012 birth statistics is negligible since only 0.1% of live births were registered to same sex couples. In 2012 there were 556 live births registered to same sex couples in a civil partnership and 252 live births registered to same sex couples outside a civil partnership. For births registered under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, the age of second parent has been included with age of father. Given the relatively small number of births registered to same sex couples, this has a negligible impact on the statistics.
6. The standardised average (mean) age of mother is used in order to eliminate 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. The 2012 average age of mothers has been calculated using the mid-2012 population estimates. The average age of mothers for 2002–2010 has been calculated using population estimates for 2002–2010 revised to take account of the 2011 Census.
7. The average age at first birth is based on the estimated true birth order for all births whether inside or outside marriage. For birth registrations before May 2012, the number of previous births was only collected for births within marriage, this partial information on birth order from registration data was supplemented with data from the General Lifestyle Survey (formerly known as the General Household Survey) to give estimates of true birth order. During May 2012 changes to the Population Statistics Act were implemented. Information on the number of previous children is now collected from all mothers at birth registration and not just from married women. These two datasets were combined to produce estimates of the average age of first birth. In 2013 all data on previous live births will be taken from the birth registrations, rather than the General Lifestyle survey.
8. A list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the statistics and written commentary is available in [Pre-release Access List - Characteristics of Mother 1](#). The rules and principles which govern pre-release access are featured within the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008](#).

9. Special extracts and tabulations of births data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreements of costs, where appropriate). Such enquiries should be made to:

Vital Statistics Outputs Branch Life Events and Population Sources Division Office for National Statistics
Segensworth Road Titchfield Fareham Hampshire PO15 5RR

Tel: +44 (0)1329 444 110 E-mail: vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The ONS charging policy is available on the ONS website.

10. We would welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback to the postal or email address above.
11. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
12. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and readily accessible
- are produced according to sound methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.