

Births by Parents' Characteristics in England and Wales, 2014



Coverage: **England and Wales**

Date: **16 November 2015**

Geographical Area: **Country**

Theme: **Population**

Main points

- In 2014, over half (52%) of all live births were to mothers aged 30 and over and two-thirds (67%) of fathers were aged 30 and over.
- The average age of all fathers increased to 33.1 years in 2014, compared with 32.9 years in 2013. For mothers the average age was 30.2 years compared with 30.0 in 2013.
- The average age of first time mothers was 28.5 years in 2014, compared with 28.3 years in 2013.
- In 2014, 84% of babies were registered by parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting.
- In 2014, 38% of live births were first births, 36% were second births and 16% were third births.

Summary

This bulletin presents statistics on live births in England and Wales in 2014 by characteristics of the parents.

This package contains birth statistics by:

- age of mother (including average age of mother by birth order)
- type of registration (within marriage/civil partnership, joint, sole)
- marital status
- median interval between births
- number of previous live-born children
- age of father (including the average age of father)

- National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) of household as defined by occupation

Many of the main summary figures included in this release have been published previously. This is however the first time that birth statistics for 2014 have been published by registration type (including a breakdown by age of mother and father), single year of age of mother, age of father and NS-SEC of the household. Also released for the first time, are birth statistics for 2014 showing the average age of mother by birth order (first child, second child, etc), median interval between births and number of previous live-born children by age of mother.

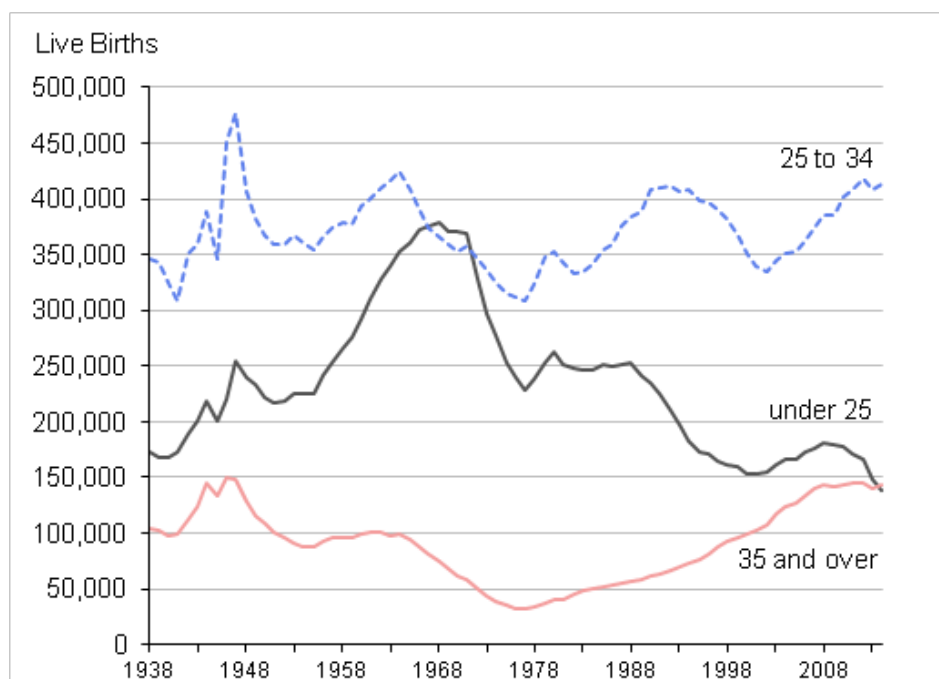
Timing of childbearing

Babies born in England and Wales in 2014 were most likely to have a mother aged 25 to 34, with over a half (59%) of mothers in this age group. A further 20% of babies were born to mothers aged under 25, while 21% had mothers aged 35 and over at the time of birth.

In 2014, there were 3 times as many births to mothers aged 25 to 34 than to mothers aged under 25 (Figure 1). The number of births to women aged 25 to 34 has exceeded the number to women aged under 25 every year since 1938 except in the 5 year period from 1967 to 1971. In 2014, there were more births to women aged 35 and over than to those under 25 for the first time.

Figure 1: Live births by age group of mother, 1938 to 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

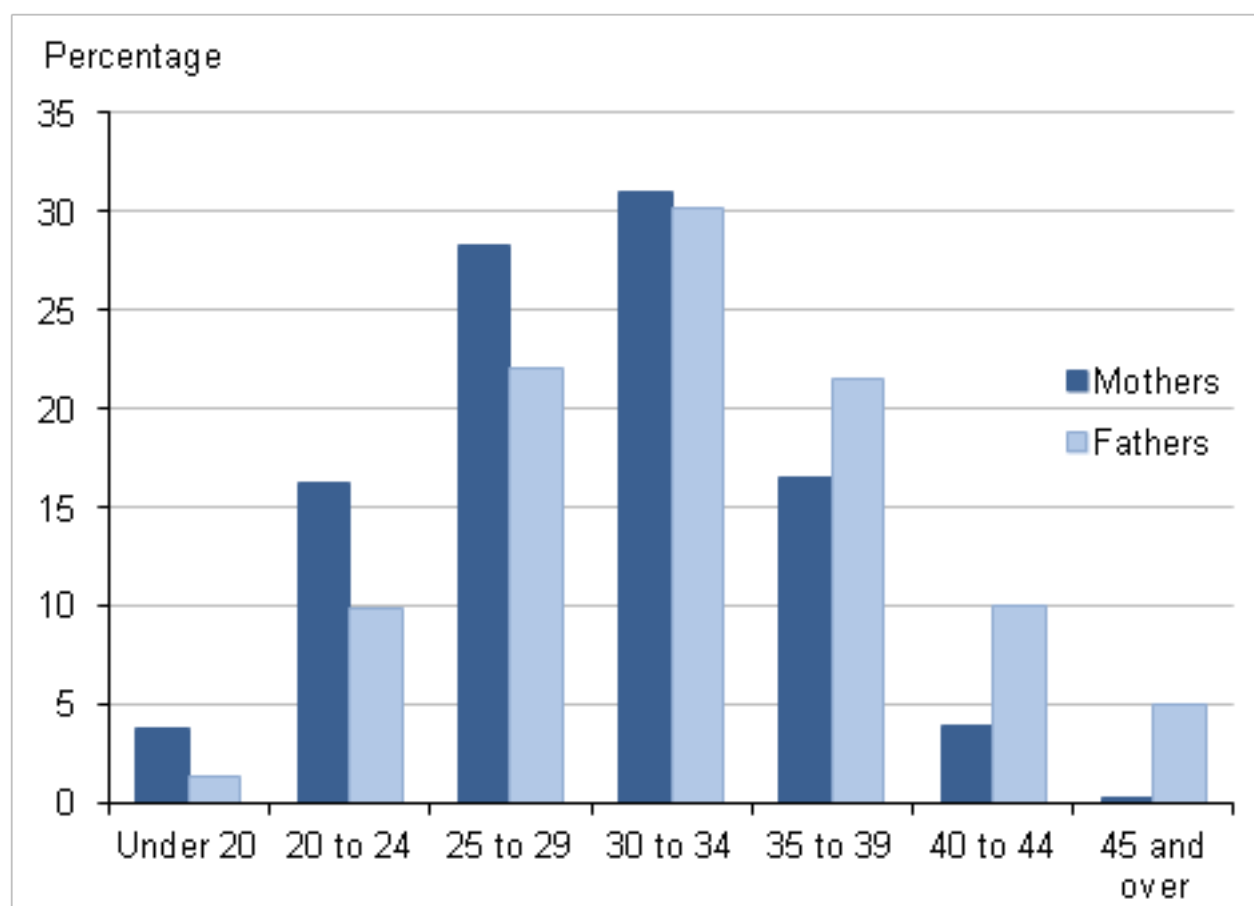
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(29.5 Kb)

Fathers tend to be older than mothers (Figure 2). In 2014, two-thirds (67%) 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 2004).

Figure 2: Live births by age group of mother and father, 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

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In 2014, the standardised average (mean) age of all mothers giving birth in England and Wales was 30.2 years, a small increase compared with 30.0 years in 2013 (background note 5 has more information). A similar increase was recorded among the average age of fathers, increasing from 32.9 years in 2013 to 33.1 years in 2014.

Between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s, the average age of mother decreased by just less than 3 years (29.3 years in 1944 to 26.4 years in 1973 to 1975). Since 1975 the average age of mother has generally increased. The overall rise since 1975 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 ([Fertility postponement and educational enrolment](#)). The average age of father has followed a similar trend since 1964 (figures only available from this point) with the average age of father consistently being around 3 years higher than the average age of the mother.

These figures refer to all births; however, the standardised average age of women having a first birth in 2014 was 28.5 years, compared with 28.3 in 2013 and 27.1 in 2004 (background note 6 has more information). Changes in the average age of mother for first births since 1940 mirror changes in the average age of all mothers.

Partnership status of parents

Marriage or civil partnership (background note 4) 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 2014 just over half of births occurred within marriage or civil partnership (53%) compared with 58% in 2004 and 93% in 1964.

The percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership (47% in 2014) varies considerably by age. Almost all women (96%) aged under 20 who gave birth in 2014 were not married or in civil partnership. In contrast, at ages 30 to 34 and 35 to 39 the majority of women giving birth were either married or in a civil partnership, with only 33% and 32% of births outside marriage/civil partnership respectively; the lowest percentage across all the age groups.

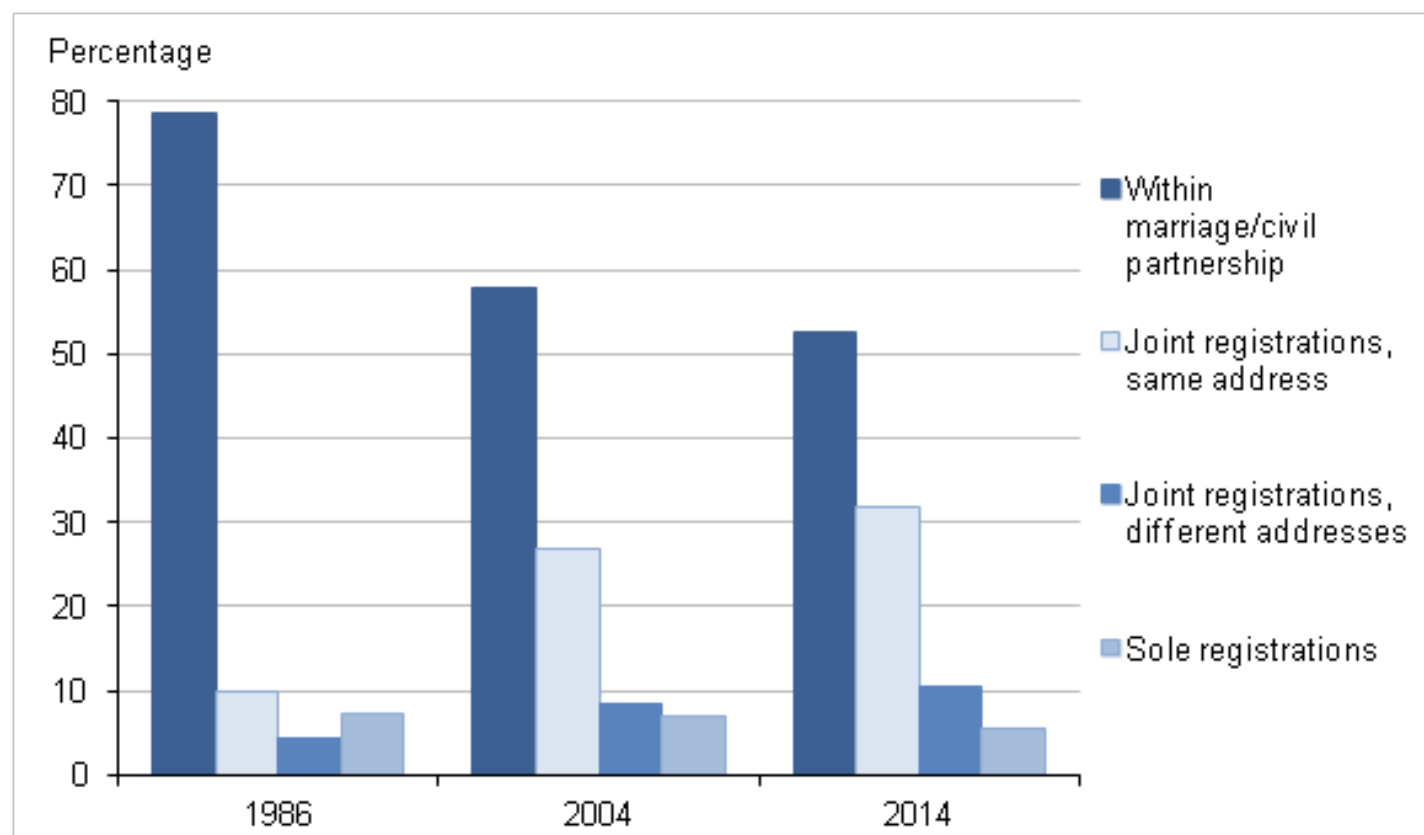
In 2014, the percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership was higher for all age groups compared with 2004.

Babies born within marriage/civil partnership are more likely to have an older father. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of babies born within marriage/civil partnership in 2014 had fathers aged 30 to 39. For babies born outside marriage/civil partnership 38% had fathers aged 30 to 39 while 50% had fathers aged under 30.

Births outside marriage or civil partnership can be registered jointly by both the mother and father/second parent (background note 4), 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) with 32% of all births being registered to cohabiting parents in 2014, compared with 27% in 2004 and 10% in 1986 (the first year these figures were available). This trend is consistent with increases in the number of couples cohabiting rather than entering into marriage or civil partnership ([Families and households](#)). In contrast, the percentage of births registered solely by the mother has fallen slightly over the last 10 years from 7.1% in 2004 to 5.4% in 2014. In 1986 7.2% of births were registered by the mother alone.

Figure 3: Live births by type of registration, 1986, 2004 and 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

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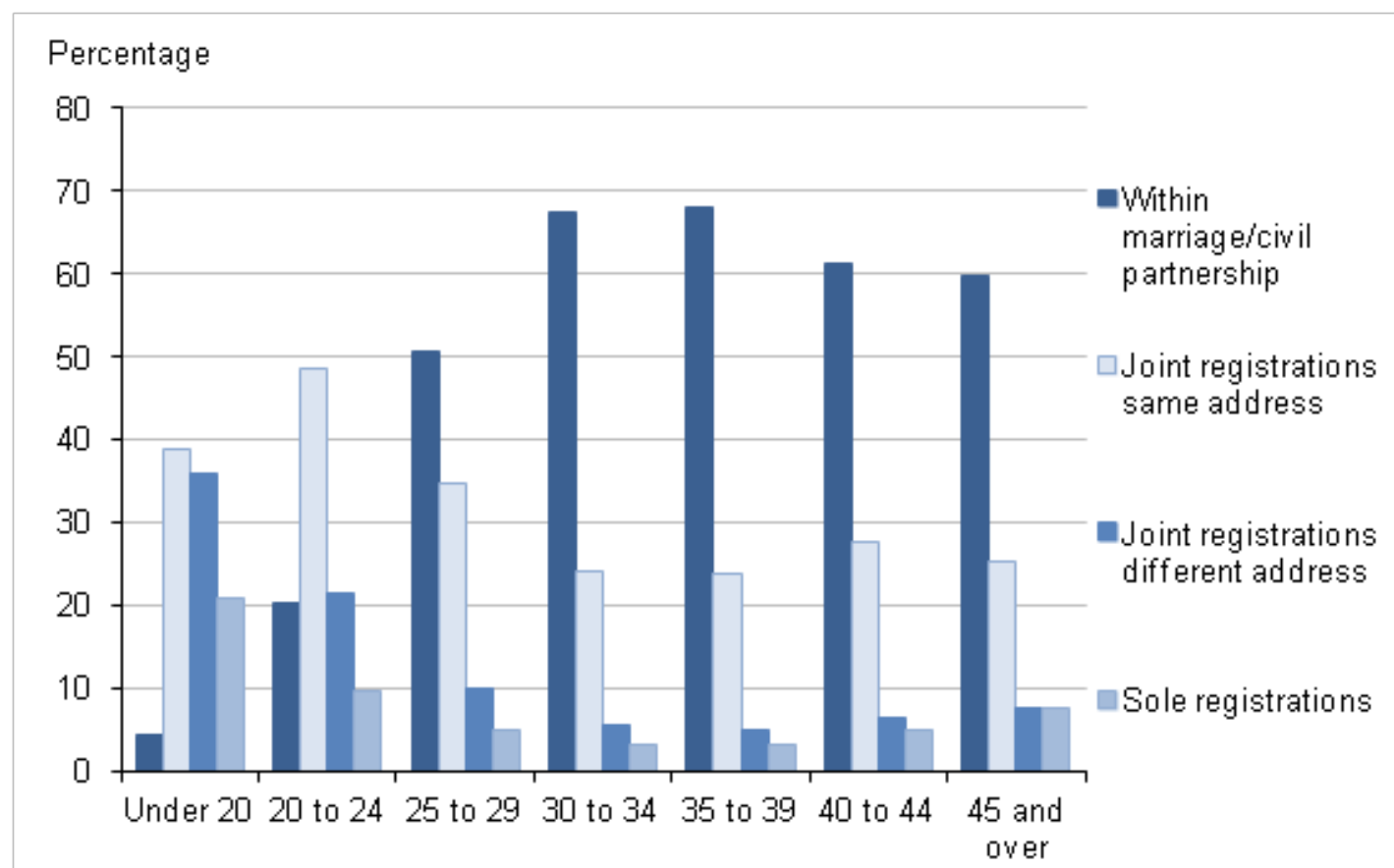
Overall, 84% of births in 2014 were to parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting. Of the remainder, a further 10% of births were registered jointly by parents living at separate addresses, while only 5.4% were registered by the mother alone.

Births to mothers aged under 25 were most likely to be jointly registered by cohabiting parents, while for women aged 25 and over, 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.

An article on [fertility and partnership status \(2.5 Mb Pdf\)](#) provides a more detailed analysis of births by registration type for the period 1991 to 2008.

Figure 4: Live births by type of registration and mother's age group, 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

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Number of previous children

In 2014, 38% of live births were first births, 36% were second births and 16% were third births.

More detailed statistics on family size can be found in our [Childbearing for women born in different years release](#), which includes data tables on:

- average number of live-born children by age and year of birth of woman
- proportion of women who have had at least 1 live birth, by age and year of birth of woman. The proportion of women who have not had children is also available

- percentage distribution of women of childbearing age by number of live-born children, by age and year of birth of woman

An interactive web page on [changing family size](#) lets you compare childbearing patterns for your cohort, with other cohorts to examine how childbearing has changed over time.

Socio-economic group

Information on the occupation of each parent is coded for only a sample of 1 in 10 live births. Combining this with the employment status, a code for socio-economic classification (or social class) may be derived. A combined method is used for reporting National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) for birth statistics (using the most advantaged NS-SEC of either parent and creating a household level classification). The combined method means that sole registered births where information on the father is not available are included in published birth statistics by NS-SEC (background note 7 has more information on NS-SEC classes).

In 2014, households employed in intermediate and routine occupations had an average (mean) age of mother at birth under 30 years while households employed in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations had an average (mean) age of mother over 30 years.

Households employed in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations were slightly less likely to have a baby of low birthweight (<2500g) with 6% of births being of low birthweight in 2014 compared with 7% of births for households employed in intermediate and routine occupations.

The majority (65%) of mothers aged under 30 were from households employed in intermediate and routine occupations. In contrast the majority (63%) of mothers aged 30 and over were from households employed in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations. (These figures have been calculated excluding births where the NS-SEC was not classified).

Changes to birth publications

From the 2014 data year, some changes have been made to the published packages. Packages that have remained unchanged are:

- [Births summary tables](#)
- [Parents' country of birth](#)
- [Births by area of usual residence](#)
- [Childbearing for women born in different years](#)

From October 2015, a number of births packages have been combined into 2 packages: [Birth characteristics](#) and [Births by parents' characteristics](#). Details of what are included in these packages are shown below:

- **Birth characteristics** – provides summary statistics on stillbirths, including birthweight data for live and stillbirths by mother's area of usual residence and maternities, live births, and stillbirths in hospitals by area of occurrence. These tables also provide live birth statistics by month and

quarter of occurrence, and maternity figures for multiple births and by place of birth. Prior to the 2014 data year, these statistics were published in separate releases: [Characteristics of birth 1](#) and [Characteristics of birth 2](#)

- **Births by parents' characteristics** – provides live birth, stillbirth and maternity statistics by age of mother, type of registration (within marriage/civil partnership, joint, sole), and average age of mother by birth order. It will also provide live birth statistics (numbers and rates) within and outside marriage/civil partnership, data on live births by age of mother and number of previous live-born children along with median birth intervals. Prior to the 2014 data year, these statistics were published in separate releases: [Characteristics of mother 1](#), [Characteristics of mother 2](#) and [Further parental characteristics](#)

Users and uses of birth statistics

The Office for National Statistics uses birth statistics to produce population estimates and population projections at both national and subnational levels, quality assure census estimates, and report on social and demographic trends.

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

Birth statistics on low birthweight by NS-SEC are used as an [indicator of social mobility](#) as there is a strong link between social background and low birth weight, and evidence suggests that children with low birth weight (less than 2,500g) tend to have poorer developmental outcomes than those weighing more than 2,500g at birth.

Local authorities and other government departments use birth statistics 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 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 birth data to inform future demand. Organisations such as Eurostat and the United Nations use birth statistics for making international comparisons. The media also report on key trends and statistics.

Further information

More data on [Births by parents' characteristics](#) are available on our website. This also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these releases on our website.

Publication dates for birth statistics are available on the [GOV.UK](#) release calendar, within “Community and Society”.

[Quality and methodology information \(257.9 Kb Pdf\)](#) 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 \(332.6 Kb Pdf\)](#).

An [interactive mapping tool](#), which enables trends in fertility to be analysed at the local level, is available.

For birth data for other UK countries, the [latest birth statistics for Northern Ireland](#) and the [latest birth statistics for Scotland](#) are available.

International comparisons of live birth rates are available in the [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#).

Background notes

1. 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 \(332.6 Kb Pdf\)](#).
2. There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between countries within the UK. Any differences are believed to have a negligible impact on the comparability of the statistics. These differences are outlined in the [Quality and methodology information \(257.9 Kb Pdf\)](#) for births.
3. Percentages reported in this bulletin may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
4. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 contained provisions enabling 2 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 2014 birth statistics is negligible since only 0.1% of live births were registered to same sex couples. In 2014 there were 713 live births registered to same sex couples in a marriage/civil partnership and 277 live births registered to same sex couples outside a marriage/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.
5. 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 this 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.

6. The average age at first birth is based on the 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. In 2012, these 2 datasets were combined to produce estimates of the average age at first birth. From 2013, all data on previous live births are taken from the birth registrations, rather than the General Lifestyle survey.

A report describing the [changes that have occurred to our birth statistics \(538.8 Kb Pdf\)](#) as a result of improvements to the Population Statistics Act is available. It provides background to the changes and provides high level findings from the new data collected in 2012 and 2013.

7. The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) has eight analytic classes, the first of which can be subdivided:

1 Higher managerial and professional occupations

1.1 Large employers and higher managerial occupations

1.2 Higher professional occupations

2 Lower managerial and professional occupations

3 Intermediate occupations

4 Small employers and own-account workers

5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations

6 Semi-routine occupations

7 Routine occupations

8 Never worked and long-term unemployed

Students, occupations not stated or inadequately described, and occupations not classifiable for other reasons are categorised as 'Not classified'.

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

Vital Statistics Output Branch

Life Events and Population Sources Division

Office for National Statistics

Segensworth Road

Titchfield

Fareham

Hampshire PO15 5RR

Tel: +44 (0)1329 444110

E-mail: vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The [ONS charging policy](#) is available on our website. In line with the [ONS approach to open data](#), ad hoc data requests will be published onto [the website](#).

9. We would welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback to the postal or email address above.
10. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
11. 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

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