Report: Live births in England and Wales, 2006: area of residence

This report provides summary statistics of live births in England and Wales during 2006 and compares them with figures for previous years. It also presents numbers and provisional fertility rates by area of residence of the mother. Further details of births in 2006 are planned for publication in the volume Births statistics 2006 (Series FM1 no.35) on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk) in December 2007.

Key observations

• The provisional general fertility rate (GFR) for 2006 was 60.4 live births per thousand women aged 15-44, a slight increase on the 2005 figure of 58.4. The GFR was last higher ten years previously in 1996 when it was 60.6.

• There were 669,531 live births in England and Wales in 2006 compared with 645,835 in 2005, an increase of 3.7 per cent.

• If the provisional patterns of fertility by age were to remain unchanged, as represented by the total fertility rate (TFR), then each woman would have an average of 1.87 children. This is the fifth consecutive annual increase from the low point in 2001 when the TFR was 1.63. The TFR is now at its highest level since 1980.

• Provisional calculations show that there have been increases in the fertility rates of women in all age groups in 2006 (see Figure 1). Women in their early thirties continued to have the highest fertility rates at 105.5 live births per thousand women aged 30 to 34.

• The average (mean) age of mothers at live birth has been rising steadily since the mid-1970s (see Figure 2). In 2006, the provisional standardised mean age of mothers giving birth increased to 29.1 years, up from 29.0 in 2005 and 28.2 in 1996. The standardised average age of mothers at birth in 2006 was 2.7 years higher than when the lowest average age was seen in 1974 (26.4). See Explanatory Note 4.

• Fertility rates for women aged 40 and over have been increasing for the last 20 years. In 2006 the provisional rate reached 11.4 live births per thousand women aged 40-44, more than double the 1986 rate of 4.8. Birth rates for women aged 40 and over are at their highest level since 1967. In 2006 there were 23,703 live births to mothers aged 40 and over, nearly double the number in 1996 (12,103) and treble the number in 1986 (7,561).

• Over the past ten years, the fertility rates of women in their twenties have fluctuated. However in 2006 the fertility rates for women aged 20-24 and 25-29 are at their highest since 1998, at 74.3 and 100.9 live births per thousand women respectively.
• In the decade since 1996, the fertility rates of women in their late thirties have increased by 43 per cent to 53.8 live births per thousand women aged 35-39 in 2006 (from 37.5 in 1996).

• The rise in the proportion of live births outside marriage continued: 42.8 per cent of live births were outside marriage in 2005, increasing to 43.5 per cent in 2006.

• The proportion of live births to mothers born outside the United Kingdom continued to rise. In 2006, 21.9 per cent of live births were to mothers born outside the United Kingdom compared with 20.8 per cent in 2005 and 12.8 per cent in 1996.

• Between 2005 and 2006, the increase in the proportion of births to mothers born outside the United Kingdom was greater than the overall increase in births. The number of live births to mothers born outside the United Kingdom increased by nearly 10 per cent from 134,189 in 2005 to 146,944 in 2006 compared with a 2.1 per cent increase for mothers born in the United Kingdom. The increase is even more notable across a decade: the number of live births to mothers born outside the United Kingdom in 2006 is 77 per cent higher than in 1996 (83,123).

• The increase in the number of births in England and Wales to mothers born outside the United Kingdom is due partly to the number of births to mothers born in countries belonging to the European Union. In 1996, there were 11,527 live births in England and Wales to mothers born in one of the other 23 member states of the European Union as constituted in 2006, (excluding the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland). This was 1.8 per cent of all live births that year. In 2006, this proportion more than doubled to 3.8 per cent, with 25,558 births. See Explanatory Note 6.

• The number of live births to mothers born in European Union has increased by a quarter (25.2 per cent) between 2005 and 2006, six times the overall increase in live births. See Explanatory Note 7.

Variations in fertility by area are shown in Tables 2 and 3 where numbers of live births, and provisional GFRs and TFRs are presented for administrative and health areas. See Explanatory Note 3.

• The highest level of fertility among Government Office Regions of England in 2006, as represented by the GFR, was in London with 65.4 live births per thousand women aged 15-44, followed by the West Midlands (62.2). The lowest GFR was in the North East (55.9).

• The highest fertility level among Government Office Regions of England in 2006, as represented by the TFR was in the West Midlands where there was an average of 1.96 children per woman. The lowest was in the North East with 1.78.
• Two London boroughs recorded the highest GFRs in England and Wales. The borough of Newham was highest with 90.4 live births per thousand women aged 15-44, followed by Barking and Dagenham (85.5). The lowest GFR was in Durham county district (36.2).

• Newham had the highest TFR of 2.56 children per woman, after Rutland (see Explanatory Note 3). The lowest TFR was in Westminster (1.12) followed by Kensington and Chelsea (1.17).

• In Wales, the national GFR was 57.8 live births per thousand women aged 15-44 and the TFR was 1.84 children per woman.

• In Wales, the unitary authority with the highest GFR was Caerphilly (63.4); the highest TFR was recorded at 2.13 in Merthyr Tydfil. The lowest fertility was seen in Ceredigion where the GFR was 38.1 and the TFR was 1.38.

Explanatory Notes

1. In this report, all fertility rates and standardised mean ages of mothers for 2006 are provisional. At subnational level they have been calculated using mid-2005 population estimates and at the national level the 2004-based population projections for 2006 have been used. These are available on the Government Actuary’s Department website (www.gad.gov.uk/Population/index.asp). The population figures used to calculate national level fertility rates for 2005 and earlier years are ONS mid-year population estimates. The population estimates used were the most up-to-date at the time of publication of this report. Further information on population estimates can be found on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk/popest).

2. Numbers of births, GFRs and TFRs are given by mother’s usual area of residence, based on 2006 Local and Strategic Health Authority area boundaries (Local Health Boards in Wales).

3. The TFR has been calculated using the number of live births and the 2005 mid-year population estimates (sub-nationally) and the 2004-based 2006 projections (nationally) for women by single year of age. This generally produces a better match of births to those at risk of having births. However, local authority level population estimates are only considered reliable in five-year age bands. Thus, especially in small local authorities, it should be noted that rates computed using single year of age data may produce spurious results. In particular the rate for Rutland is affected by the low estimated female population aged 20, 21 and 22.

4. The provisional standardised mean age is a measure which allows fertility trends to be separated out from the effects of changes in the population’s age structure over time. The unstandardised mean age shows the mean age of mothers who had births in 2006 and is not adjusted for the age structure of the population.
5. Data collected on the number of births for 1981 were affected by a registrars strike. Figures for this year are based on a 10 per cent sample of registrations.

6. For comparability, the 1996 births data for mothers born outside the United Kingdom was reclassified according to the 2006 country classification list and the definition of the European Union, as constituted in 2006, was used for both years’ data. The percentage of births to mothers born in Europe excludes births where the mother was born in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland.


8. Further information on live births in 2006 can be found in Reference Tables 2.1 and 3.1 to 3.3 in this publication and at the births topic-based summary on the National Statistics website: [www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=369](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=369)