

Statistical bulletin

Births by parents' characteristics in England and Wales: 2015

Live births 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).



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1 . Main points

In 2015, over half (53%) of all live births in England and Wales were to mothers aged 30 and over and two-thirds (68%) of fathers were aged 30 and over.

The average age of all fathers increased to 33.2 years in 2015, compared with 33.1 years in 2014. For mothers the average age was 30.3 years compared with 30.2 years in 2014.

The average age of first-time mothers was 28.6 years in 2015, compared with 28.5 years in 2014.

In 2015, 84% of babies were registered by parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting.

In 2015, 39% of live births were first births, 36% were second births and 15% were third births.

2 . Statistician's quote

"The average age of mums and dads in England and Wales has increased by almost 4 years over the last 4 decades. At the birth of a child in 2015, fathers averaged 33.2 years of age and mothers 30.3 years. Falling birth rates among the under-30s and rising birth rates at older ages reflect trends evident since the mid-1970s to delay childbearing to later ages."

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

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3 . Things you need to know about this release

Important information for interpreting these birth statistics:

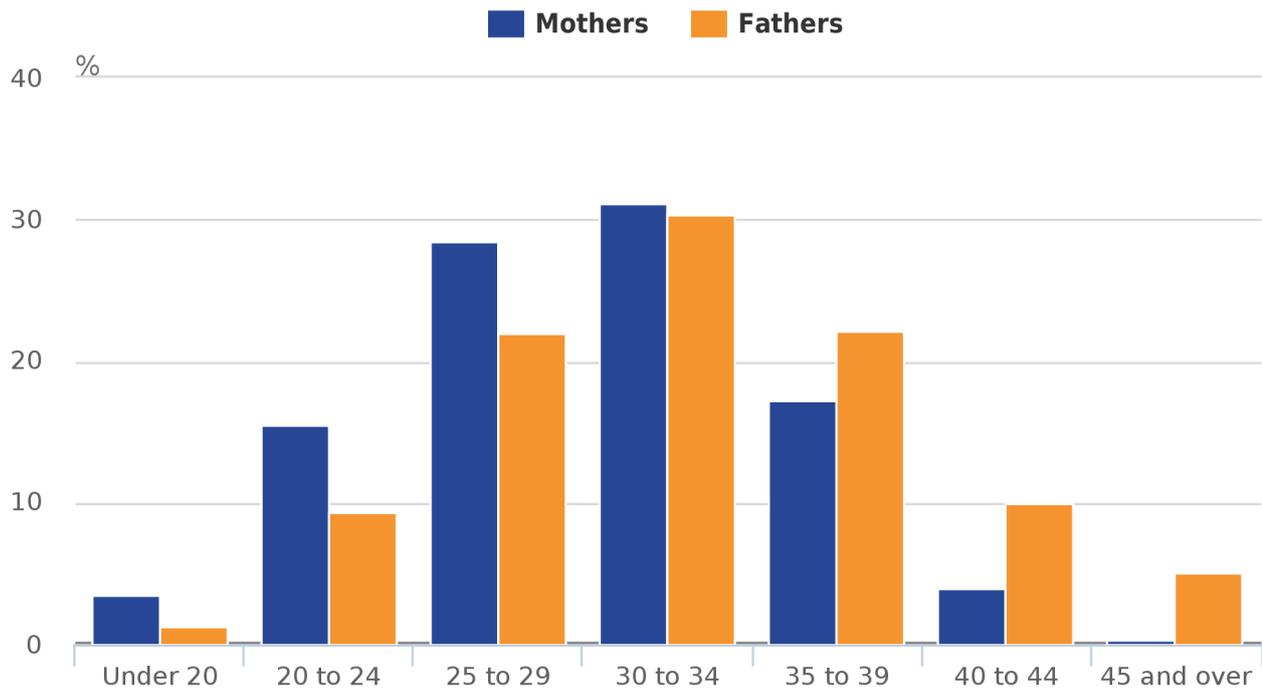
- birth statistics represent births that occurred in England and Wales in the calendar year, but include a very small number of late registrations from the previous year
- figures are compiled from information supplied when births are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement

4 . Fathers tend to be older than mothers

Over two-thirds (68%) of babies born in England and Wales in 2015 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 increased slightly over the last 2 decades from 57% in 1995 and 66% in 2005. In contrast, 53% of mothers in 2015 were aged 30 and over, up from 40% in 1995 and 49% in 2005.

Figure 1: Live births by age group of mother and father, 2015

England and Wales

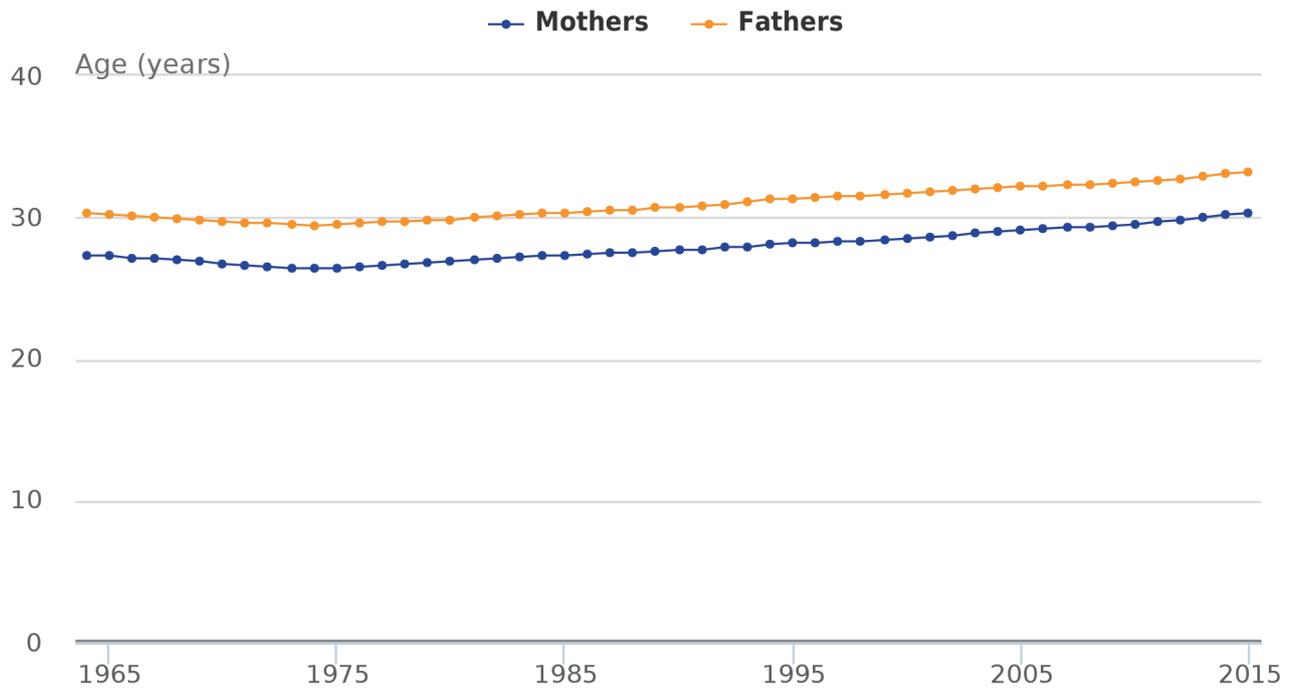


Source: Office for National Statistics

The average (mean) age of all fathers for babies born in England and Wales in 2015 was 33.2 years, up slightly from 33.1 years in 2014. A small rise was also recorded among the average age of mothers, up to 30.3 years in 2015 from 30.2 years in 2014. Since 1964, changes in the average age of fathers have mirrored changes in the average age of mothers, with the average age of fathers consistently being around 3 years higher than the average age of mothers (Figure 2); a long-term rise has been recorded since 1975 in the average ages of mothers and fathers reflecting trends to delay childbearing to later ages.

Figure 2: Average age of mothers and fathers at the birth of their child, 1964 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Standardised averages (means) have been used in order to eliminate the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age. More information is available in the Quality and methodology section, point 7.

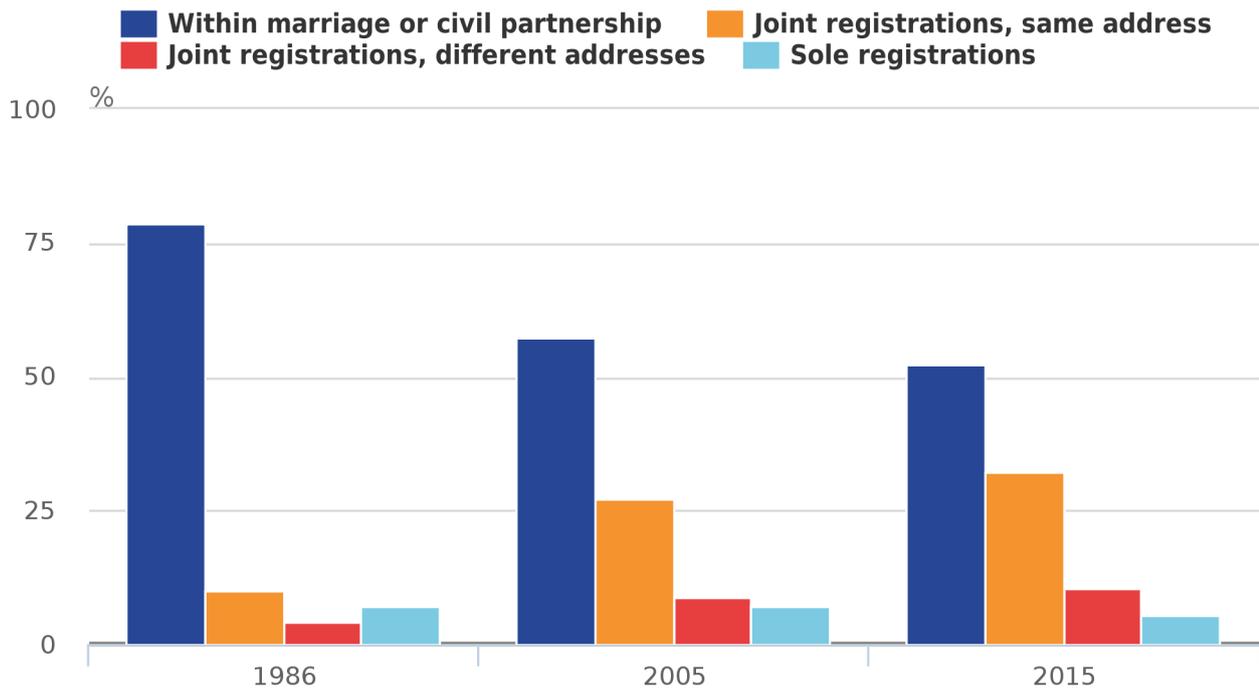
The average age of women having a first birth in 2015 was 28.6 years, compared with 28.5 years in 2014 and 27.2 years in 2005. Changes in the average age of first-time mothers since 1940 are similar to those recorded for the average age of all mothers.

5 . Babies born within marriage tend to have older mothers and fathers

Marriage or civil partnership 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.

Figure 3: Live births by type of registration, 1986, 2005 and 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

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

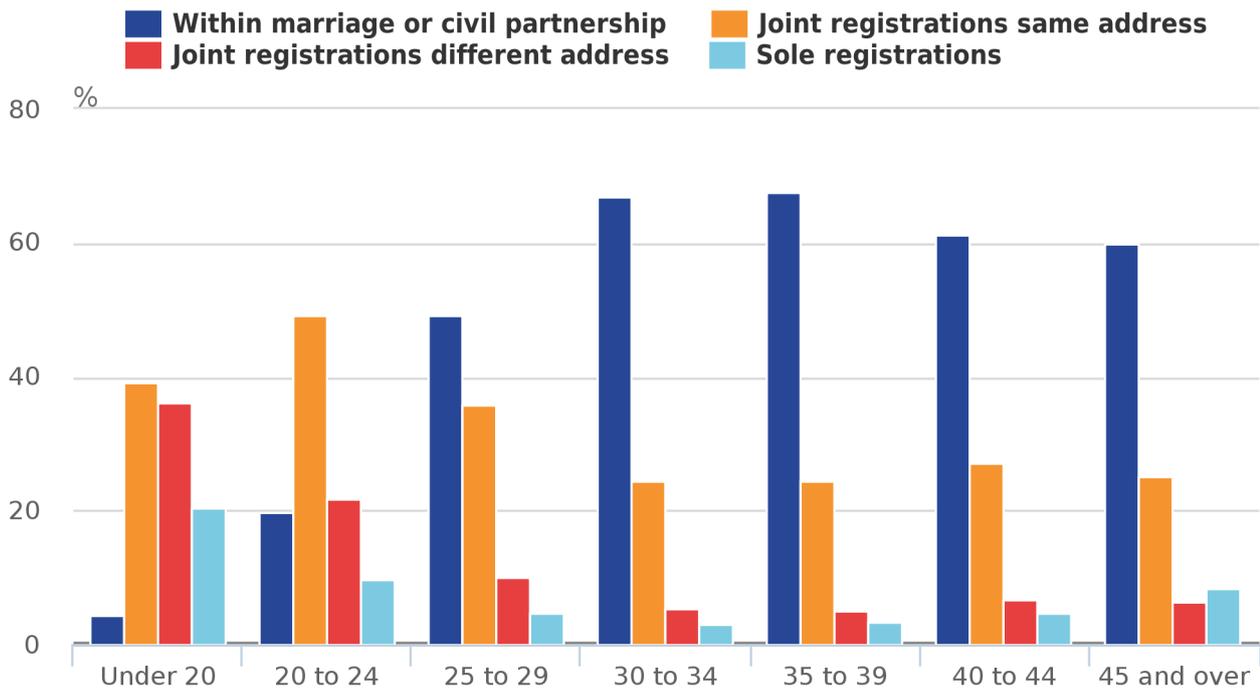
Births outside marriage or civil partnership can be registered jointly by both the mother and father or second parent, or solely by the mother. Where the birth is jointly registered and the parents give the same address, it can be inferred that they are cohabiting (couples who are not married but living together). The proportion of births registered to cohabiting parents has increased in recent years (Figure 3) with 32% of all births being registered to unmarried cohabiting parents in 2015, compared with 27% in 2005 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](#)).

Overall, 84% of births in 2015 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 5.3% were registered by the mother alone; the percentage of births registered solely by the mother has fallen slightly over the last 10 years from 7.0% in 2005. In 1986 by comparison, 7.2% of births were registered by the mother alone.

The percentage of births occurring within marriage or civil partnership – 52% in 2015, varies considerably by age. Only 4% of women aged under 20 who gave birth in 2015 were married or in a civil partnership. In contrast, at ages 30 to 34 and 35 to 39 the majority of women (67%) giving birth were either married or in a civil partnership; the highest percentage across all the age groups. In 2015, the percentage of births occurring within marriage or civil partnership was lower across all age groups compared with 2005.

Figure 4: Live births by type of registration and mother's age group, 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Births to mothers aged under 25 were most likely to be jointly registered by cohabiting parents, while for women aged 25 and over, marriage or civil partnership was the most common family setting for births, followed by cohabitation (Figure 4). The percentage of births that 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.

Babies born within marriage or civil partnership are more likely to have an older father. In 2015, of all babies born within marriage or civil partnership 81% had fathers aged 30 and over, this compares with 51% of babies born outside marriage or civil partnership. The same is true for mothers – 67% of babies born within marriage or civil partnership had mothers aged 30 and over compared with 37% of babies born outside marriage or civil partnership.

6 . Most births in 2015 were to mothers who already had at least 1 child

In 2015, of all live births 39% were first births, 36% were second births and 15% 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.

7 . Mothers tend to be younger in households employed in intermediate and routine occupations

In 2015, households employed in intermediate and routine occupations as defined by the [National Statistics Socio-economic classification](#) had an average (mean) age of mother at birth under 30 years; households employed in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations had an average age of mother over 30 years.

8 . Links to related ONS statistics

More data on [Births by parents' characteristics](#) are available on our website. The dataset also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these; see the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) for information on planned publication dates.

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 dataset tables](#), international comparisons of live birth rates are also available.

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 (vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk or telephone: +44 (0)1329 444110). User requested data will be published onto [our website](#).

9 . Quality and methodology

1. This publication provides statistics on live births in England and Wales by characteristics of the parents.

Some of the main summary figures have been published previously. This is however, the first time that birth statistics for 2015 have been published on:

- age of father (including age-specific fertility rates (ASFR) for men)
- type of registration (within marriage, joint, sole) by age of mother
- mean age of mother by birth order
- median interval between births
- number of previous live-born children
- National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) of household as defined by occupation

2. 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.

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

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

4. Our [User Guide to Birth Statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to births and includes a glossary of terms.

5. 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 [Quality and Methodology Information](#) for births.

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

7. The standardised average (mean) age of father and mother has been used in order to eliminate the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age; this enables trends over time to be analysed. Standardised means are calculated using rates per 1,000 male or female population by single year of age.

8. 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. Our [User Guide to Birth Statistics](#) provides further information on NS-SEC. The [3-class version](#) has been used to report figures in this bulletin.

9. Due to small numbers, births registered to a same sex couple in a marriage or civil partnership (881 in 2015) are included with marital births while births registered to a same sex couple outside a marriage or civil partnership (339 in 2015) are included with births outside marriage. Same sex female couples have been able to register the birth of a child as mother and second parent since 1 September 2009.