Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

# Births in England and Wales: 2019

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

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July to August 2021 (provisional)

## Table of contents

# 1 . Acknowledgement

In memory of Frankie Smith, a valued friend and colleague.

# 2 . Other pages in this release

Other commentary from the latest birth data can be found on the following page:

- Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales: 2019

# 3 . Main points

- There were 640,370 live births in England and Wales in 2019, a decrease of 2.5% since 2018 and a 12.2% decrease since the most recent peak in 2012.
- The total fertility rate (TFR) for England and Wales decreased from 1.70 children per woman in 2018 to 1.65 children per woman in 2019; this is lower than all previous years except 2000, 2001 and 2002.
- The TFR for Wales was the lowest since records began in 1982 at 1.54 children per woman.
- Fertility rates for women in age groups under 30 years were at the lowest level since records began in 1938.
- Fertility rates decreased in all age groups except for women aged 40 years and over, among whom the rate increased to 16.5 births per 1,000 women.
- The stillbirth rate for England fell to a record low for the third consecutive year to 3.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births, while the stillbirth rate for Wales increased from 4.4 to 4.6 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2019.

## Statistician's comment

"The story of births in England and Wales in 2019 is one of decreases and record lows, with the total number of births continuing the fall we've seen in recent years. Wales had the lowest fertility rate since our records began and England's is nearing its record low.

"For stillbirths, the rate in England continued the decline seen in recent years, reaching a record low of 3.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2019. To achieve the government ambition to halve stillbirth rates in England by 2025, the rate must fall to 2.6 by that year."

David Corps, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics

Follow Vital Statistics Outputs Branch on Twitter @NickStripe_ONS.

# 4 . Number of births and fertility rates

This bulletin provides data on births in England and Wales in 2019. For information on how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected our 2020 data collection, please see Section 10: Measuring the data.

The number of live births in England and Wales decreased for the fourth consecutive year. In 2019, there were 640,370 live births; this is a 2.5% decrease from 657,076 live births in 2018 and the fewest since 2004.

The total fertility rate (TFR) was lower in 2019 than in all previous years except 2000, 2001 and 2002. The TFR accounts for the size and age structure of the female population of childbearing age and therefore provides a better measure of trends than simply looking at the number of live births.

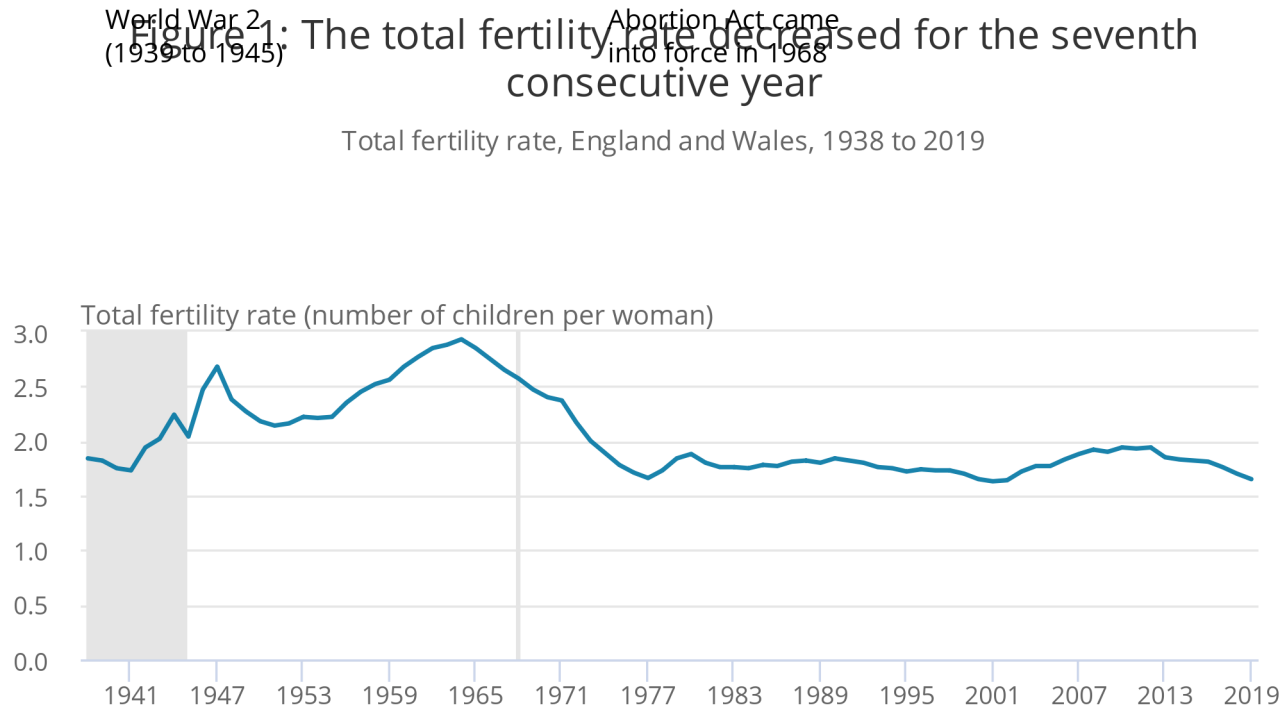
In 2019, the TFR in England and Wales fell to 1.65 children per woman, a 2.9% decrease from 2018. TFRs have been decreasing year on year since 2013 (Figure 1). The TFR provides a timely measure of fertility levels and can be affected by changes in the timing of childbearing, completed family size and the population structure.

Possible reasons for the decrease in TFRs in recent years could be:

- improved access to contraception
- the reduction in mortality rates of children aged under 5 years, resulting in women having fewer babies
- lower levels of fertility, or difficulties conceiving because of postponement in childbearing

**Figure 1: The total fertility rate decreased for the seventh consecutive year**

**Total fertility rate, England and Wales, 1938 to 2019**




**Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales**

**Notes:**

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year, plus a very small number of late registrations from the previous 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.

Since 1973, the TFR in England and Wales has been below replacement level. Replacement fertility is the level of fertility required for the population to replace itself in size in the long term. In the UK, women would need to have, on average, 2.08 children to ensure long-term "natural" replacement of the population. This trend in fertility rates in England and Wales could extend globally as continued progress in female educational attainment and access to contraception contribute to declines in fertility rates across the world and as such slow population growth.

# 5 . Fertility rates by age of mother

The standardised mean age of mother at childbirth was 30.7 years and has been gradually increasing since 1973 when it was 26.4 years. This trend is replicated in age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) where, for the fifth consecutive year, the fertility rate for women aged under 20 years (11.2) was lower than the rate for women aged 40 years and over (16.5); this is a pattern last recorded in 1947. Fertility rates for women aged over 40 years have been steadily increasing since 1978 (Figure 2).

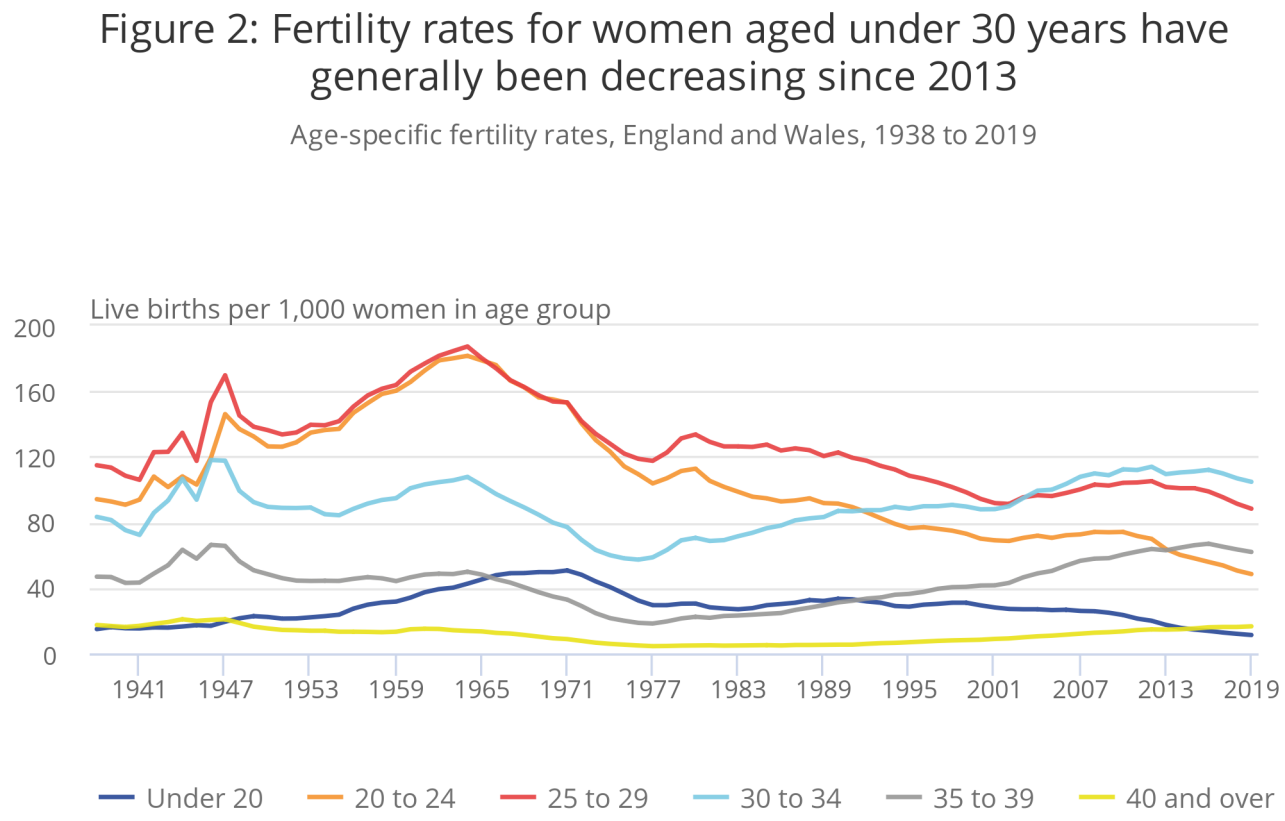
In 2019, the ASFRs in each age group for women aged under 30 years were at their lowest levels since records began in 1938. Fertility rates for women in the age groups under 30 years have generally been decreasing each year since 2013 (Figure 2).

These trends suggest women are progressively delaying childbearing to older ages. Reasons for women delaying having children until later in life could include:

- greater participation in higher education
- delaying marriage and/or partnership formation
- wanting to have a longer working career before starting a family
- labour market uncertainty and the threat of unemployment

**Figure 2: Fertility rates for women aged under 30 years have generally been decreasing since 2013**

**Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1938 to 2019**




**Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales**

**Notes:**

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year, plus a very small number of late registrations from the previous year.

2. The rates for women aged under 20 years and aged 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 because of the late submission of some birth registrations resulting from 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 onwards.

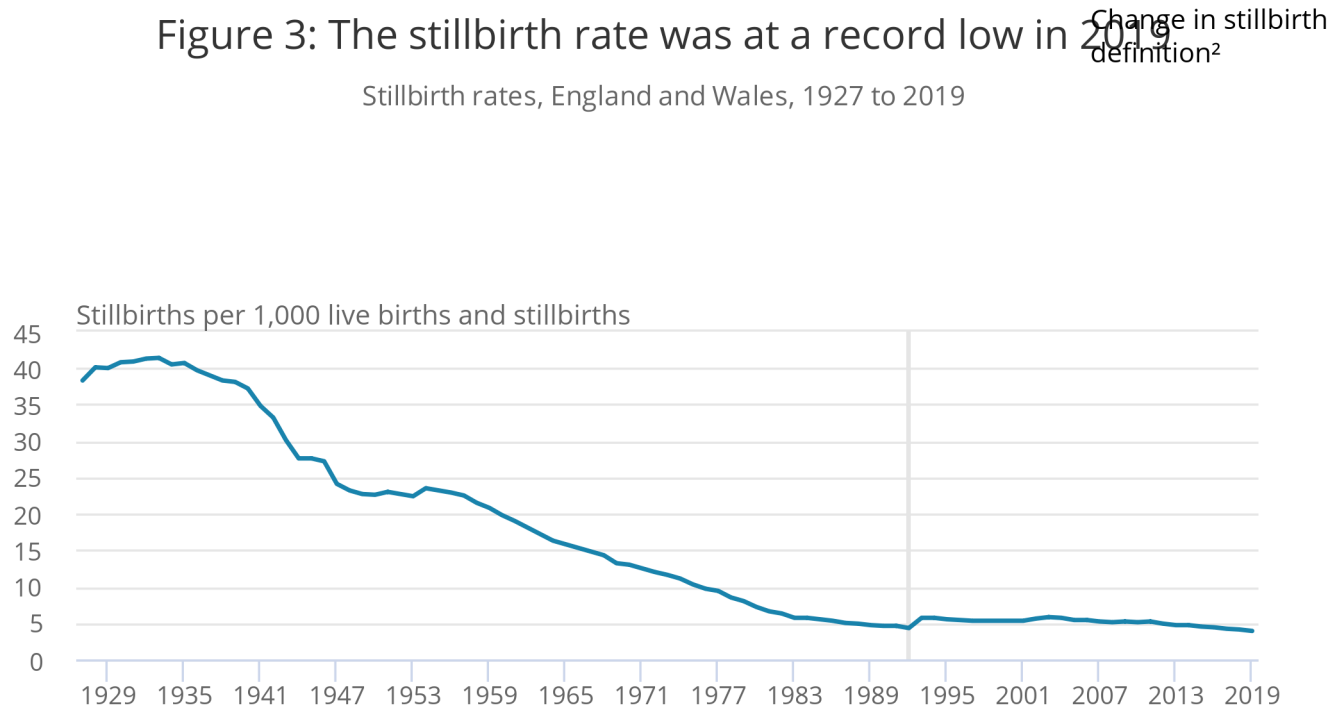
# 6 . Stillbirths

In 2019, the number of stillbirths in England and Wales was at a record low, falling by 6.2% from 2018 to 2,522. Stillbirth rates are a better measure of trends over time because they account for the number of stillbirths as a proportion of total births.

For the third year running, the stillbirth rate reached an all-time low since records began in 1927, falling to 3.9 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2019; this is a 4.9% decrease compared with 2018 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The stillbirth rate was at a record low in 2019**

**Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1927 to 2019**




**Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales**

**Notes:**

1. Based on live births and stillbirths occurring in each calendar year, plus a very small number of late registrations from the previous year.

2. On 1 October 1992, the Still-Birth (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 2014, the government announced policies and campaigns to reduce the rate of stillbirths by half in England by 2025 compared with 2010. Health is a devolved matter, meaning it is the responsibility of the individual countries of the UK, which is why this ambition is only for England. The stillbirth rate in England reached a record low at 3.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2019, a decrease from 5.1 stillbirths in 2010. By 2025, the stillbirth rate for England would need to decrease to 2.6 stillbirths per 1,000 total births if the government ambition is to be met. If the total number of births remained constant until 2025, achieving the ambition would require the number of stillbirths to fall from 2,346 in 2019 to approximately 1,594 by 2025; this would be a decrease of 752 stillbirths.

# 7 . Fertility rates by geographic area

The total fertility rate (TFR) in England was 1.66 children per woman in 2019, a decrease of 2.4% compared with 2018. The TFR in Wales was the lowest since records began in 1982 at 1.54 children per woman, a 5.5% decrease from the previous year.

Across all English regions, the TFR decreased compared with 2018. The regions with the highest and lowest TFRs remained the same as 2018, with the East being the highest at 1.77 children per woman and the North East the lowest with 1.52 children per woman.

The interactive map (Figure 4) shows the changes in TFRs from 2001 to 2019 across England and Wales. In 2019, the local authorities with both the lowest and highest TFR were in London.

When we look at fertility rates in even smaller areas, like in Figure 4, it is important to consider the numbers involved. In some local authorities, the total childbearing population is small, so if there is a small change in the number of live births in these areas, there can be large changes in the TFRs. Other variations can be a result of differences in the characteristics of the population living in each area such as social, economic and cultural differences.

**Figure 4: The total fertility rate decreased in a large proportion of local authorities between 2018 and 2019**

Total fertility rates by local authority district, England and Wales, 2001 to 2019

# 8 . Births data

Births in England and Wales: summary tables
Dataset | Released 22 July 2020
Annual summary statistics on live births and stillbirths, by sex, age of mother, whether inside marriage or civil partnership, percentage of non-UK-born mothers, birth rates and births by mothers' area of usual residence.

## Filter these data

- Live births in England and Wales: birth rates down to local authority areas (2013 to 2019)
- Live births in England and Wales by sex and characteristics of mother: national and regional (2013 to 2019)
- Live births in England and Wales by characteristics of mother and father (2013 to 2019)
- Live births in England and Wales down to local authority local area (2013 to 2019)
- Live births in England and Wales for small geographic areas (2013 to 2019)

# 9 . Glossary

## Age-specific fertility rate (ASFR)

The age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) is the number of live births to mothers of a particular age per 1,000 women of that age in the population. This is useful for comparing fertility of women at different ages or women of the same age in different populations.

### Live birth

A baby showing signs of life at birth is a live birth.

### Standardised mean age

The standardised mean (average) age (for example, at birth or marriage) is a measure that eliminates 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.

### Stillbirth

A stillbirth is a baby born after 24 or more weeks' completed gestation and who did not, at any time, breathe or show signs of life.

### Total fertility rate (TFR)

The total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of live children a group of women would have if they experienced the ASFR for the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lifespan. This is useful as it accounts for the size and age structure of the female population of childbearing age.

A more complete glossary is available from our User guide to birth statistics.

## 10 . Measuring the data

Birth statistics represent births that occur and are then registered in England and Wales. Figures are derived from information recorded when live births and stillbirths are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement; these data represent the most complete data source available.

In England and Wales, the registration of births is a service carried out by the Local Registration Service in partnership with the General Register Office (GRO).

Birth registration data are then supplemented to obtain birthweight data by linking the birth registration to the NHS birth notification when a birth is registered.

Further linkage of the birth registration to the NHS birth notification is conducted within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to obtain the age of the mother where this was missing on the birth registration and to enable the analysis of further characteristics such as ethnicity of the baby and gestation of live births.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the Births QMI.

## Coronavirus and birth statistics

The data in this publication are not affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as they relate to births for the year ending 31 December 2019; in normal circumstances, births should be registered within 42 days and our annual data extract only includes births registered before 25 February. For more information, please see our User guide to birth statistics.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic and the announcement of lockdown measures, birth registration services in England and Wales were temporarily suspended in March 2020. Since June 2020, birth registrations have restarted where it is safe to do so. In line with the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') response on the production of statistics during the pandemic, we are monitoring the implications of any delays in 2020 births registrations and exploring the possibility of using alternative data sources to estimate 2020 births data in a more timely manner.

# 11 . Strengths and limitations

Our User guide to birth statistics provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to conceptions, and it includes a glossary of terms.

## National Statistics status for Births in England and Wales

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standard of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

Date of most recent full assessment: September 2011.

Most recent compliance check that confirms National Statistics status: September 2011.

The improvements we have made since the last review include:

- revisions to the way statistics are produced are explained in the User guide, detailing the year the change took place and reason why
- in cases where corrections were implemented, they were accompanied by explanations of the change and the reasons why
- where applicable, we added background information into our User guide and QMI to inform the user of the differences in methods between the UK countries and the reasons underlying these differences
- following a consultation on proposed changes to statistics, we made changes in 2018 to the way that birth statistics are published; five explorable datasets are now released in July alongside the first release of annual births data, which means more detailed birth data (including small area geographies) are now available in a timelier manner

# 12 . Related links

Baby names in England and Wales: 2018
Bulletin | Released 29 August 2019
Most popular first names for baby boys and girls in 2018 using birth registration data.

Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2018
Bulletin | Released 6 December 2019
Annual live births by sex, ethnicity and month, maternities by place of birth and with multiple births, and stillbirths by age of parents and calendar quarter.

Explorable datasets for births in England and Wales
Datasets | Updated as new data become available
Datasets on life events in England and Wales.

Births in Scotland
Web page | Updated as new data become available
National Records of Scotland's (NRS's) statistics on births.

Births in Northern Ireland
Web page | Updated as new data become available
Births statistics from 1887 onwards and Baby Names statistics from 1997 onwards for Northern Ireland.

User guide to birth statistics
Article | Released 6 December 2019
Supporting information for birth statistics, which present figures on births that occur and are then registered in England and Wales. Figures are based on information collected at birth registration.