

Statistical bulletin

Births in England and Wales: 2020

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



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Release date:
14 October 2021

Next release:
July to August 2022 (provisional)

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1 . Other birth outputs in this release

Other commentary from the latest births data can be found on the following pages:

- [Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales: 2020](#)
- [Births in England and Wales explained: 2020](#)

2 . Main points

- There were 613,936 live births in England and Wales in 2020, a notable decrease of 4.1% from 2019.
- The total fertility rate (TFR) reached a record low in 2020, decreasing to 1.58 children per woman.
- Fertility rates decreased across all age groups.
- The stillbirth rate reached a record low for the fourth year in a row, with 3.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2020.

Delays in birth registrations because of the coronavirus pandemic [have affected 2020 data](#).

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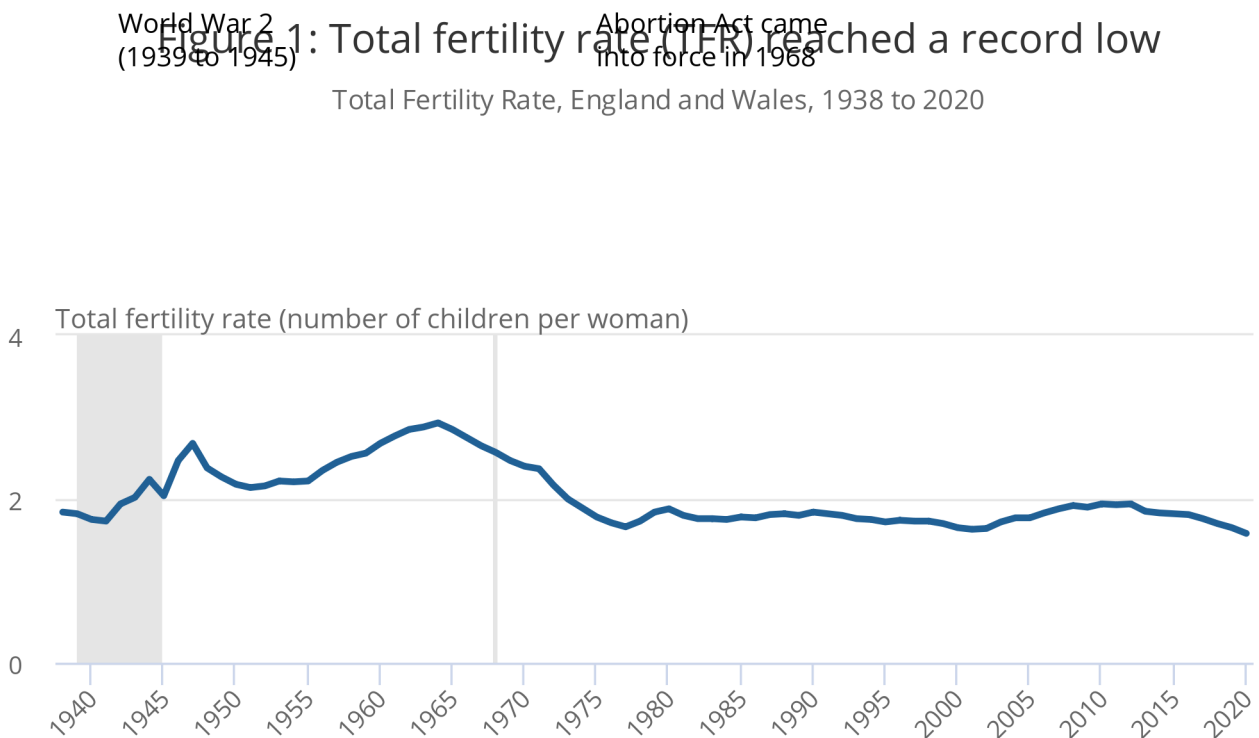
3 . Live births and fertility rates

For the fifth consecutive year, the number of live births in 2020 for England and Wales decreased to 613,936, the lowest since 2002. Since the most recent peak in 2012, the number of live births dropped by 15.9%.

The [total fertility rate \(TFR\)](#) for England and Wales in 2020 fell to 1.58 children per woman, the lowest since records began in 1938. The rate is 4.2% lower than 2019 and 3.1% lower than the previous record low in 2001, when the rate was 1.63 children per woman.

Figure 1: Total fertility rate (TFR) reached a record low

Total Fertility Rate, England and Wales, 1938 to 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. 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.

As discussed in the [2019 release](#), the TFR has been below [replacement level](#) since 1973 and TFRs have been decreasing year on year since 2012 (Figure 1). Reasons for the decreases in TFRs in recent years could be:

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

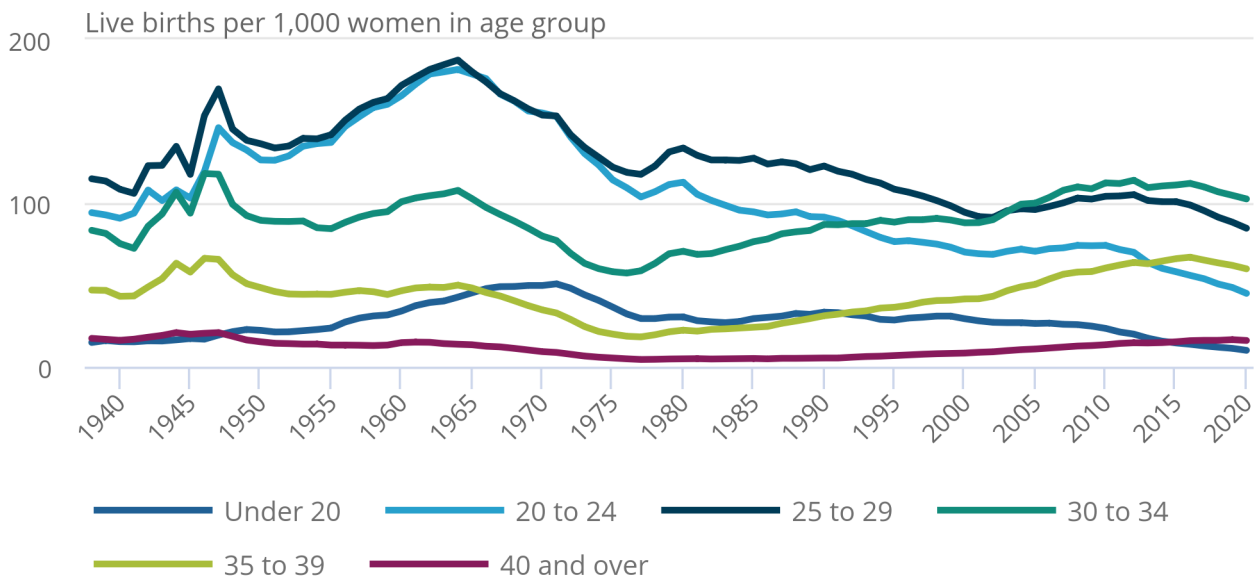
The average age (as measured by [standardised mean age](#)) of mothers at childbirth remained the same as 2019, at 30.7 years following a gradual increase since 1973. [Age-specific fertility rates \(ASFRs\)](#) decreased across all age groups, including for women aged 40 years and over for the first time since 2013. Fertility rates for those aged 40 years and over had generally been increasing since the late 1970s.

Figure 2: Fertility rates for woman over the age of 40 decreased for the first time since 2013

Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1938 to 2020

Figure 2: Fertility rates for woman over the age of 40 decreased for the first time since 2013

Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1938 to 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. For more information on the calculation of age-specific fertility rates see the [Glossary](#).

4 . Stillbirths

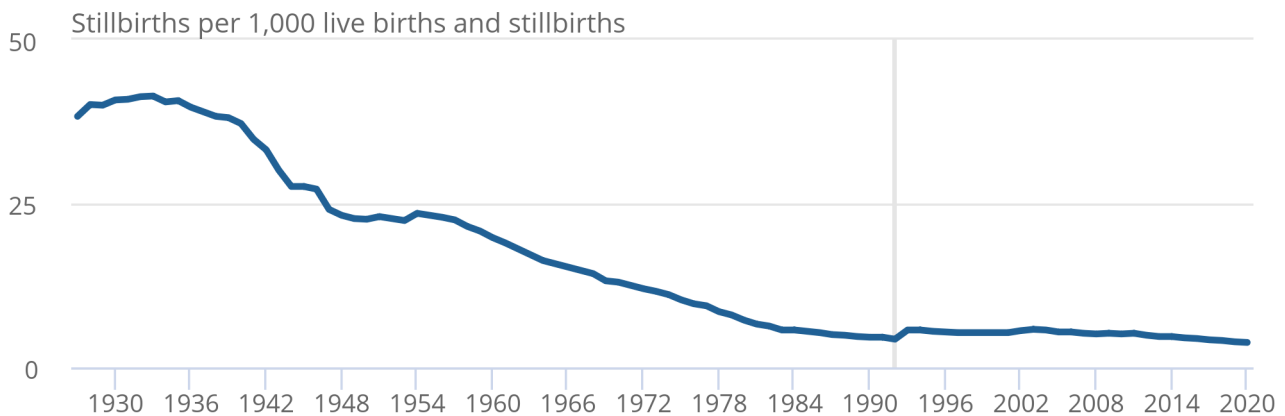
In 2020, the number of stillbirths in England and Wales was 2,371. This is a 6% decrease compared with 2019 and the lowest since records began in 1927.

For a fourth consecutive year, the stillbirth rate in England and Wales reached a record low of 3.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births; a decrease from 3.9 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2019 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stillbirth rate reached a record low

Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1927 to 2020

Figure 3: Stillbirth rate reached a record low Change in stillbirth definition
Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1927 to 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics - Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Figures for stillbirths from 1993 are not fully comparable with those for previous years due to a definitional change, see [Glossary](#).

In 2014, the government announced [policies](#) and [campaigns](#) to reduce the rate of stillbirths by half in England by 2025 compared with 2010. To achieve this, the stillbirth rate would need to [decrease to 2.6 stillbirths per 1,000 total births](#). In 2020, the stillbirth rate for England was 3.8 stillbirths per 1,000 total births.

5 . Fertility rates by geographic area

The total fertility rate (TFR) for England was 1.59 children per woman in 2020, decreasing from 1.66 children per woman in 2019, a decrease of 4.2%. The TFR for Wales reached a record low for the second consecutive year, falling to 1.47 children per woman in 2020 from 1.54 children per woman in 2019, a decrease of 4.5%.

Fertility rates decreased across all regions in England, with the highest and lowest TFRs remaining consistent with 2019.

Figure 4: Total fertility rate (TFR) by local authority district, England and Wales, 2001 to 2020

Notes:

1. 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.
2. Figures are based on mothers' usual area of residence, based on boundaries as of May 2021.
3. The total childbearing population in some local authorities is small so any small change in the number of live births can result in a large localised TFR change.

Download this chart

[.xlsx](#)

6 . Births data

[Births in England and Wales: summary tables](#)

Dataset | Released 14 October 2021

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.

Please filter the explorable datasets for births in England and Wales

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

7 . Glossary

Age-specific fertility rate (ASFR)

The number of live births to mothers of a particular age per 1,000 women of that age in the population. Useful for comparing fertility of women at different ages or women of the same age in different populations. The rates for women under 20 years and 40 years and over are based on the female population aged 15 to 19 years and 40 to 44 years respectively. Age-specific fertility rates for 1981 are based on a 10% sample because of the late submission of some birth registrations because of a registrars' strike. 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.

Live birth

A baby showing signs of life at birth.

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.

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 which did not, at any time, breathe or show signs of life. 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.

Stillbirth rate

The stillbirth rate is defined as the number of stillbirths per 1,000 live births and stillbirths.

Total fertility rate (TFR)

TFR is the average number of live children that a group of women would have if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates for the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lifespan. It is a better measure of trends than the number of livebirths, since it accounts for the size and age structure of the female population of childbearing age. The rate 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.

A [more complete glossary](#) is available from our User guide to birth statistics.

8 . Measuring the data

Our data are for live births occurring in each calendar year, plus a very small number of late registrations from the previous year. Figures include mothers and fathers whose usual residence is outside England and Wales.

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, which is a legal requirement. These data represent the most complete data source available.

The registration of births is a service carried out by the Local Registration Service in partnership with the General Register Office (GRO), in England and Wales. Birth registration is linked to the NHS birth notification within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to obtain the age of the mother where this was missing on the birth registration. It also enables the analysis of further characteristics such as birthweight, 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 [Birth statistics QMI](#).

Coronavirus and birth statistics

Delays in birth registrations because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have affected 2020 data. In normal circumstances, births should be registered within 42 days and our annual data extract only includes births registered before 25 February.

Birth registration services in England and Wales were temporarily suspended in March 2020. From June 2020, registrations services restarted where it was safe to do so. In line with the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) response on the [COVID-19 and the production of statistics](#) during the pandemic we have been monitoring the implications of any delays in births registrations. In 2020, 42% of registrations came in after 42 days (the usual legal limit). Therefore, we decided to include all births registered up to 12 August 2021 in the 2020 dataset to ensure that our birth statistics for 2020 are as complete as possible and comparable with previous years. For more information, please see [Births in England and Wales explained: 2020](#) and our [User guide to birth statistics methodology](#).

9 . Strengths and limitations

Our [User guide to birth statistics methodology](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to conceptions, and 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.

Our most recent [UK Statistics Authority full assessment](#) that was published in September 2011 is available to view.

Improvements since last review:

- 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 additional background information into our [User guide to birth statistics](#) and [Births 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 October alongside the first release of annual births data. This means more detailed birth data (including small area geographies) are now available in a timelier manner.

10 . Related links

[Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales: 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 14 October 2021

Annual statistics on live births including countries of birth for non-UK-born mothers and fathers.

[Explorable datasets for births in England and Wales](#)

Datasets | Updated as new data become available

Datasets on life events in England and Wales.

[Baby names in England and Wales: 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 26 August 2020

Most popular first names for baby boys and girls in 2018 using birth registration data.

[Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 16 November 2020

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.

[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.

[Births in Scotland](#)

Web page | Updated as new data become available

National Records of Scotland's (NRS's) statistics on births.

[User guide to birth statistics](#)

Article | Released 14 October 2021

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.