

Statistical bulletin

Births in England and Wales by Characteristics of Birth 2: 2013

Home births and multiple births in England broken down by mothers' age group.



Contact:
Elizabeth McLaren
vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Release date:
17 November 2014

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Main findings](#)
2. [Summary](#)
3. [Home births](#)
4. [Multiple births](#)
5. [Users and uses of characteristics of birth 2 statistics](#)
6. [Changes to birth statistics](#)
7. [Further information](#)
8. [References](#)
9. [Background notes](#)

1. Main findings

- There were 698,512 live births in England and Wales in 2013, of which 340,129 were girls and 358,383 were boys
- The percentage of women giving birth at home remained at 2.3% in 2013, unchanged from 2012
- 15.6 out of every 1,000 women giving birth had a multiple birth in 2013, down from a peak of 16.1 in 2011
- 10,783 mothers had a multiple birth in 2013; 10,593 women had twins, 187 had triplets and 3 had quads and above (multiple births include stillbirths)
- Women aged 45 and over were most likely to have a multiple birth (95.0 out of every 1,000 women giving birth in this age group had a multiple birth)

2. Summary

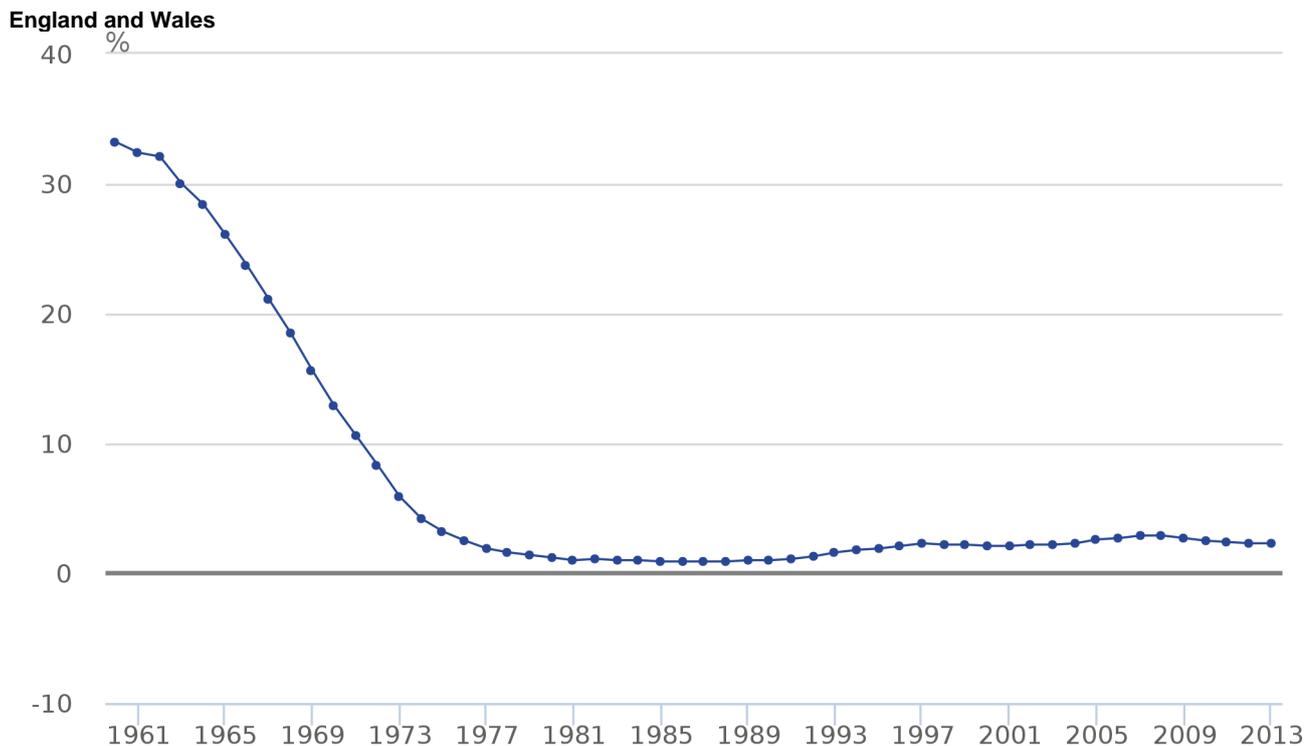
This bulletin presents statistics on births in England and Wales in 2013 by characteristics of birth. In particular, it provides statistics for women giving birth at home and for women having multiple births. Some of the key summary figures have been published previously by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is however, the first time that birth statistics for 2013 have been published:

- by quarter and month
- by place of birth
- for multiple maternities

3. Home births

In 2013 in England and Wales, 2.3% of women giving birth did so at home (Figure 1), unchanged from 2012. In 1960, the percentage of women giving birth at home was 33%, but this fell to a record low between 1985 and 1988 when only 0.9% of women gave birth at home. Between 1988 and 2008 there was a small rise in the percentage of women giving birth at home, with the exception of a period of relative stability between 1997 and 2004. More recently, between 2009 and 2012, the percentage of women giving birth at home declined slightly.

Figure 1: Maternities taking place at home, 1960-2013



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children, including stillbirths. The chart therefore shows the percentage of women giving birth at home rather than the percentage of babies born at home.

In 1950s post-war Britain the health service ran campaigns to persuade mothers to go into hospital to give birth. At this time housing conditions and general health were relatively poor and for many women hospital would have been the safest environment in which to give birth. The shift away from home births took place largely between 1963 and 1974, during which time the percentage of women giving birth at home fell from 30% to 4.2% at a rate of two to three percentage points per year. During this time the stillbirth rate fell from 17.2 stillbirths per 1,000 births (live and stillbirths) in 1963, to 11.1 in 1974.

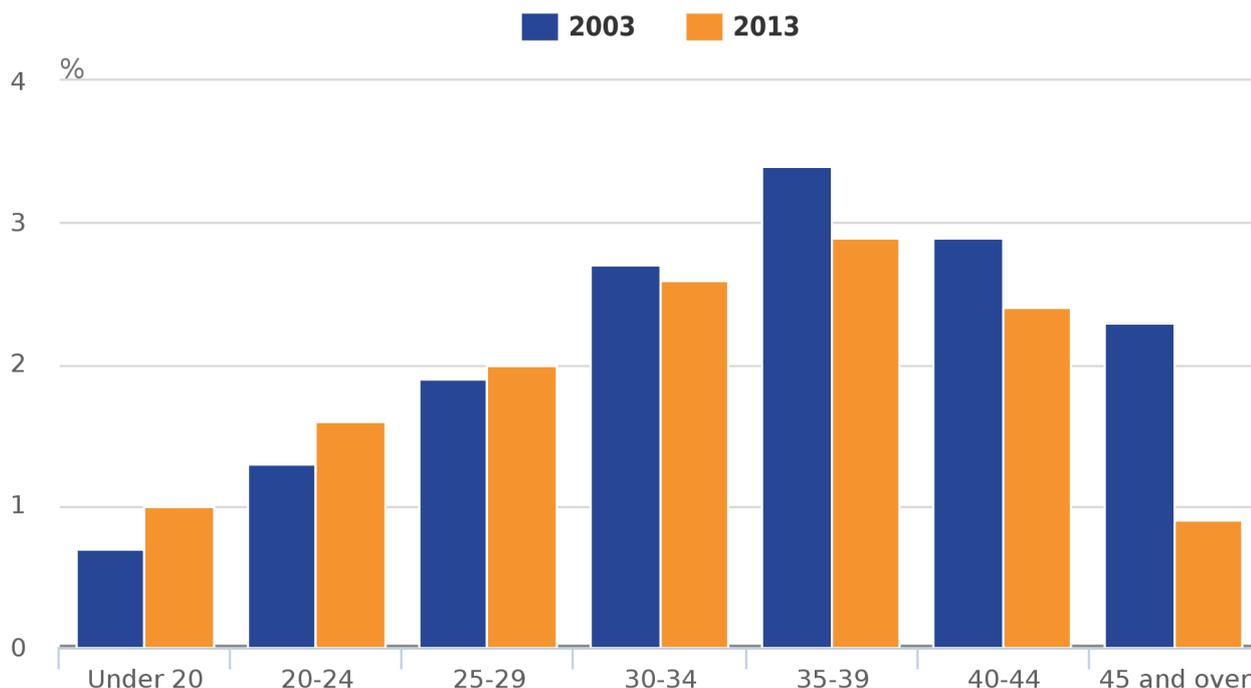
Since the early 1990s, government policy in England has been that women should be provided with a choice about where to give birth, and the information they need in order to make the best choice for them. More recently, the National Health Service (NHS) has encouraged women to choose where they give birth ([Department of Health, 2007](#)).

The South West had the highest percentage of women giving birth at home in 2013 (3.2%) while the North East had the lowest (1.1%). The South West and the North East also had the highest and lowest percentages respectively of women giving birth at home in 2012.

In 2013, women aged 35-39 had the highest percentage of births at home (2.9%). In contrast, women aged 45 and over had the lowest percentage, with 0.9% of women in this age group giving birth at home in 2013. Figure 2 shows how the percentage of women giving birth at home varies by age group and provides a comparison between 2003 and 2013. The percentages of women giving birth at home have decreased in all age groups for women aged 30 and over and have increased in all age groups under 30.

Figure 2: Maternities taking place at home, by Age of Mother, 2003 and 2013

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children, including stillbirths. The chart therefore shows the percentage of women giving birth at home rather than the percentage of babies born at home.
2. The percentage of women giving birth at home is reported within each age group. For example in 2013, 1.6% of all maternities to women aged 20–24 took place at home.
3. The percentage of women giving birth at home, aged 45 and over, was calculated from fewer than 20 maternities in both 2003 and 2013. Their reliability as a measure may be affected by the small number of events.

[Nove et al \(2008\) \(819.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) provides a detailed analysis of home births in the UK, from 1955 to 2006. The article examines how home maternity levels vary according to mother's age, number of previous live births within marriage, country of birth and local authority.

4. Multiple births

In 2013 there were 10,593 women who gave birth to twins, 187 to triplets and 3 to quads and above. These multiple maternities (see background note 5) include both live births and stillbirths.

The multiple maternity rate in 2013 decreased slightly to 15.6 per 1,000 women giving birth, compared with 15.9 in 2012. Overall, the multiple maternity rate increased between 1976 and 2011. In 1976, there were 9.6 multiple maternities per 1,000 maternities, rising to a peak of 16.1 in 2011. The largest increase in the multiple maternity rate was recorded between 1990 and 1995, when the rate rose from 11.6 to 14.1: a 22% increase.

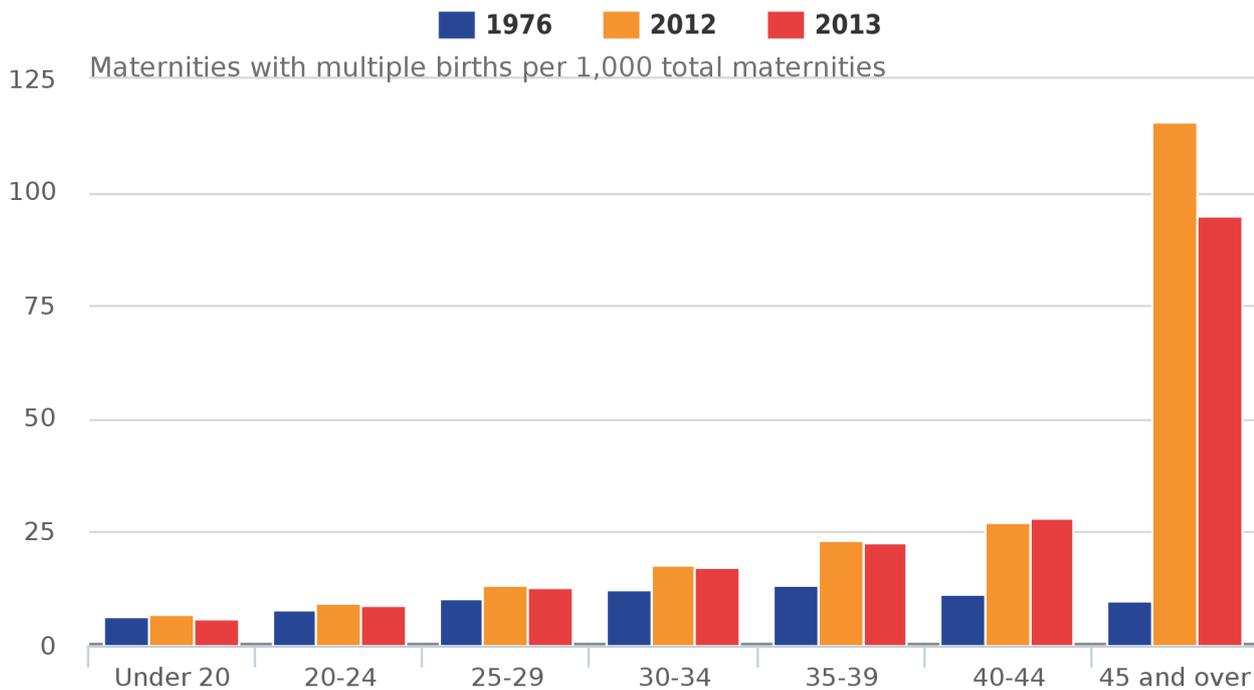
In 1976, women aged 35-39 had the highest multiple maternity rate (13.4 per 1,000 maternities). Between 1976 and 2011 the multiple maternity rate increased for all age groups, but most notably for women aged 30 and over.

The greatest increase was among women aged 45 and over where the multiple maternity rate rose from 9.8 in 1976, to 99.3 in 2011. Multiple maternity rates have fallen since 2011 for women aged 20-39. For those aged under 20 the multiple maternity rate increased in 2012 before falling slightly in 2013.

When comparing 2013 with 2012, the multiple maternity rate decreased for all age groups with the exception of women aged 40-44 (Figure 3). Women aged 45 and over had by far the highest multiple maternity rate in 2013 (95.0 per 1,000 maternities), although this has decreased by 18% since 2012 (the largest percentage decrease across all ages). Women aged under 20 had the lowest multiple maternity rate in 2013 (6.1 per 1,000 maternities), decreasing by 9.0% since 2012.

Figure 3: Maternities with multiple births by Age of Mother, 1976, 2012 and 2013

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Multiple births arising from a single pregnancy are counted as one maternity. The number of maternities indicates the number of women having babies (including stillbirths) rather than the number of babies born.
2. The 1976 multiple maternity rate for women aged 45 and over was calculated from fewer than 20 maternities. Its reliability as a measure may be affected by the small number of events.

Although most multiple births occur naturally, many occur as a result of fertility treatment. On average, 1 in 5 of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) pregnancies are a multiple pregnancy, compared to 1 in 80 for women who conceive naturally ([Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority \(HFEA\)](#)). With approximately 17,000 IVF babies born in the UK in 2011, this contributes significantly to the multiple birth rate ([HFEA, 2014](#)). The average age of women undergoing IVF treatment in 2012 was 35 years ([HFEA, 2014](#)).

The high multiple maternity rate among women aged 45 and over is a result of higher levels of assisted fertility treatments (including medicines which stimulate ovulation and assisted conception which includes IVF) at these ages.

In 2009 the HFEA launched the elective single embryo transfer (eSET) policy (now called the multiple births minimisation policy). This allowed centres to develop their own eSET strategy, with the aim to reduce the UK IVF multiple pregnancy rate to 10% over a period of years ([HFEA](#)).

On average multiple births tend to have lower birthweights than singletons ([Office for National Statistics, 2014a](#)) which is one reason why the infant mortality rate is around five times higher for multiple births than for singleton births. Multiple pregnancies are also associated with a higher risk of stillbirth, death under 28 days and child disability ([HFEA](#)).

5. Users and uses of characteristics of birth 2 statistics

Multiple birth statistics and the number of home births are monitored by the NHS and Department of Health to help ensure that adequate maternity and support services are available. Other organisations, such as the Multiple Birth Foundation, who provide advice, information and support to multiple birth families and health professionals, use multiple birth statistics to monitor trends.

Statistics on home births are used by organisations such as Birth Choice UK, to help women decide where they might like to have their baby and promote women's rights to a home birth.

6. Changes to birth statistics

In May 2012 changes were made to the Population Statistics Act 1938. At birth registration, information on the number of previous children and whether previously married is now collected from all mothers, not just married women. This affects a number of tables. [Proposals for changes \(66.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) to outputs for 2012 and 2013 data were outlined on the ONS website in July 2012, feedback from users was requested. As no feedback was received the proposed changes are being implemented.

These changes have affected [tables 5 and 7 in this release \(505 Kb Excel sheet\)](#), which provide statistics by birth order. Data for 2013 onwards is now provided for all maternities – not just those within marriage. Data for 2013 represents the first full year of information available on the number of previous children collected at registration.

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

An investigation of [Childbearing by registration status in England and Wales, using birth registration data for 2012 and 2013](#) examines the patterns and characteristics in birth registrations following the improvements to the data collected at birth registration. The principal characteristics explored in the report relate to whether a woman has been previously married, and whether the birth is the mother's first child or subsequent child.

7. Further information

This statistical bulletin provides supporting commentary for the ['Characteristics of Birth 2' \(505 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) package which includes data tables on births in England and Wales in 2013, by month and quarter of occurrence, multiple births and place of birth. Further information relating to the tables and this bulletin can be found on the metadata tab at the front of the data tables. The data file also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these on the ONS website.

The first release of [summary statistics of live births and stillbirths in England and Wales in 2013](#) was published on 16 July 2014. Theme specific packages are then released between August and December. ['Characteristics of Birth 1'](#) was published on 24 September 2014, this provides summary statistics on:

- stillbirths by age of parents and quarter of occurrence
- birthweight data for live and stillbirths by mother's area of usual residence
- maternities, live births, and stillbirths in hospitals by area of occurrence

Further packages providing 2013 birth statistics will be published on 4 December 2014:

- Characteristics of Mother 2, England and Wales
- Childbearing for Women Born in Different Years, England and Wales (formally known as Cohort Fertility)
- Further Parental Characteristics, England and Wales

Further publication dates of detailed 2013 birth statistics are available on the [GOV.UK](#) release calendar, within the 'Community and Society' topic.

[Quality and Methodology Information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) 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 \(439.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).

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 please see the [latest birth statistics](#) for Northern Ireland and the [latest birth statistics for Scotland](#).

International comparisons of live birth rates are available in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#).

8. References

Department of Health (2007), Maternity matters: Choice access and continuity of care in a safe service, available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_074199.pdf

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Multiple births and single embryo transfer review, available at: www.hfea.gov.uk/Multiple-births-after-IVF.html

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (2014), Fertility Treatment in 2012: trends and figures, available at: www.hfea.gov.uk/104.html

Nove A, Berrington A, Matthews Z (2008), Home births in the UK, 1955-2006. Population Trends 133 pp 20-27, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/population-trends-rd/population-trends/no--133--autumn-2008/home-births-in-the-uk--1955-to-2006.pdf

Office for National Statistics (2014a), Childhood, Infant and Perinatal Mortality in England and Wales, 2012, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/child-mortality-statistics--childhood--infant-and-perinatal/2012/stb-child-mortality-stats-2012.html

Office for National Statistics (2014b), Childbearing by registration status in England and Wales, using birth registration data for 2012 and 2013, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/characteristics-of-Mother-1--england-and-wales/2013/art---childbearing-by-registration-status.html

Office for National Statistics (2014c), Quality assurance of new data on birth registrations, as a result of changes to the Population Statistics Act - from May 2012 onwards, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/health-and-life-events/quality-assurance-of-new-data-on-birth-registrations.pdf

Office for National Statistics (2012), How changes to the Population Statistics Act will affect birth statistics, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/health-and-life-events/how-changes-to-population-statistics-act-will-affect-birth-statistics.pdf

9. Background notes

1. There were 698,512 live births in England and Wales in 2013, compared with 729,674 in 2012 (a fall of 4.3%). This fall represents a change to the increasing numbers of births that has been reported each year since a low in 2001, with the exception of a 0.3% fall in 2009. Between 2001 and 2012 live births rose by 23%. The fall in live births in 2013 represents the largest percentage annual decrease since 1975.
2. 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 \(439.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).
3. There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between countries within the UK. 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 the [Quality and Methodology Information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) for births.
4. Statistics on home births show the number of women giving birth at home, rather than the number of babies born at home. A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children, including stillbirths.
5. Multiple births arising from a single pregnancy are counted as one maternity, although each child born is counted separately in analyses of birth statistics (the number of maternities indicates the number of women having babies rather than the number of babies born).
6. 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 the ONS website. In line with the [ONS approach to open data](#), all [ad hoc data requests](#) will be published onto the website.

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

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and readily accessible
- are produced according to sound methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.