

Statistical bulletin

# Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2015

Live births by sex, ethnicity and month. Maternities by place of birth and with multiple births. Stillbirths by age of parents and quarter.



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# 1 . Main points

There were 697,852 live births in England and Wales in 2015, of which 339,716 were girls and 358,136 were boys.

The percentage of women giving birth at home was 2.3% in 2015, remaining unchanged since 2012.

11,073 mothers had a multiple birth in 2015: 10,901 women had twins, 169 had triplets and 3 had quads and above (multiple births include stillbirths).

16.1 out of every 1,000 women giving birth had a multiple birth in 2015.

Women aged 45 and over were most likely to have a multiple birth; 102.4 out of every 1,000 women giving birth in this age group had a multiple birth.

7.0% (48,711) of live births were low birthweight (under 2.5 kilograms) in 2015, unchanged since 2011.

## 2 . Statistician's quote

“Since 1993, women aged 45 and over have consistently had the highest proportion of multiple births – partly due to higher levels of assisted fertility treatments at these ages. Our figures for 2015 show that the proportion of women having multiple births increased slightly compared with 2014. This increase was driven by women aged 25 to 29 since at all other ages the proportion of women having multiple births either decreased or remained unchanged.”

Elizabeth McLaren, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics follow @StatsLiz on Twitter.

## 3 . Things you need to know

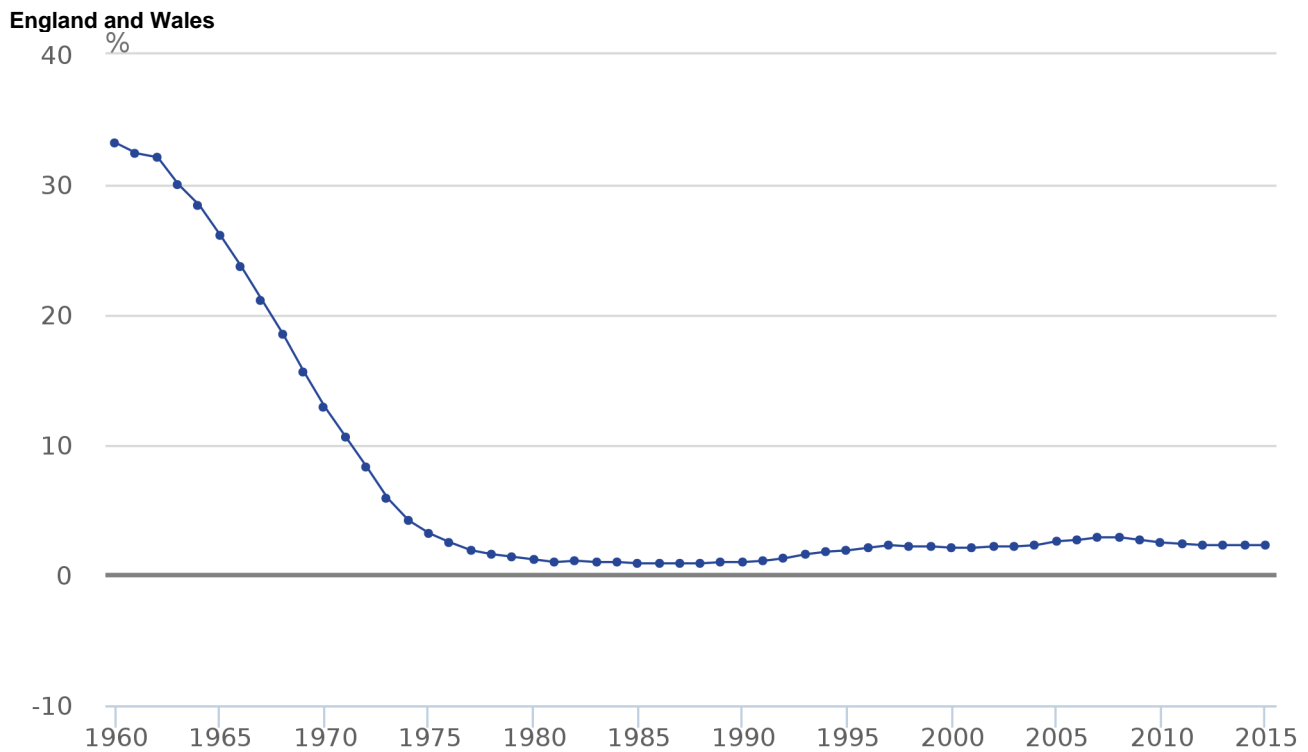
Important information for interpreting these birth statistics:

- birth statistics represent births which 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
- a maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children including stillbirths

## 4 . Women aged between 35 and 39 are most likely to have a home birth

In 2015 in England and Wales, 2.3% of women giving birth did so at home (Figure 1), unchanged since 2012. The greatest percentage of women giving birth at home over the last 3 decades was 2.9%, recorded in 2007 and 2008.

**Figure 1: Percentage of women giving birth at home, 1960 to 2015**



Source: Office for National Statistics

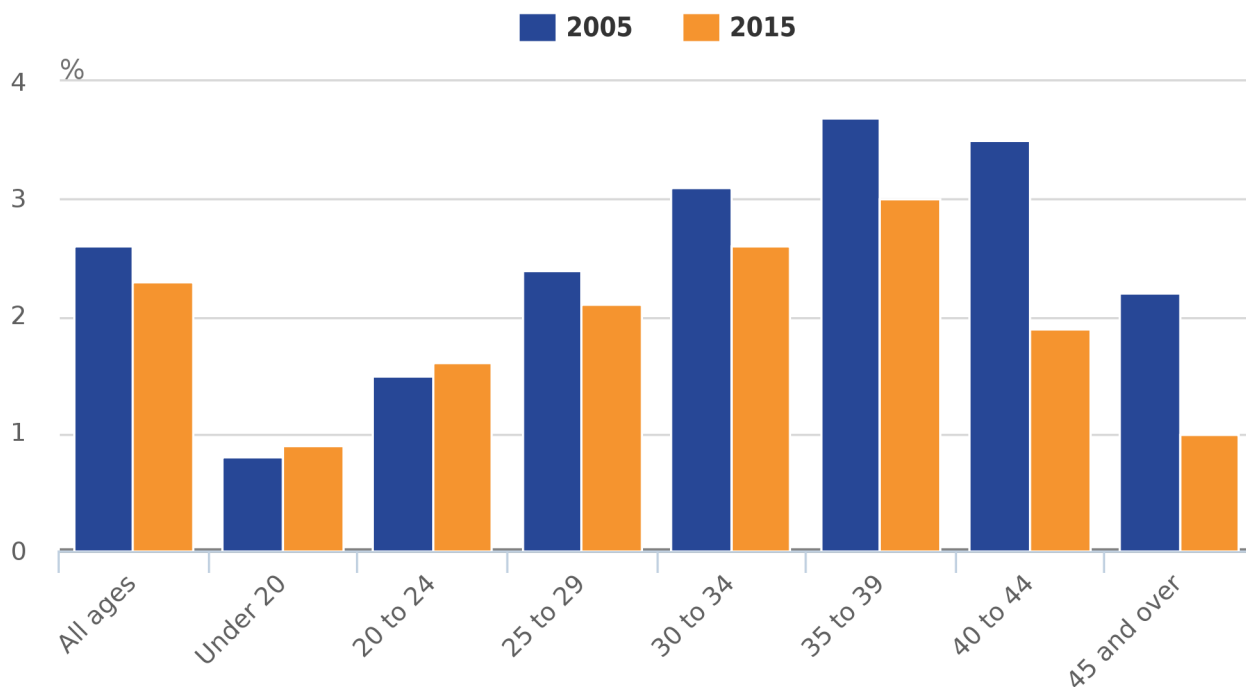
Notes:

1. This chart shows the percentage of women giving birth at home rather than the percentage of babies born at home – this includes stillbirths.

Women aged 35 to 39 were most likely to give birth at home; 3.0% of all women in this age group gave birth at home in 2015. Women aged under 20 were least likely, with only 0.9% of under twenties giving birth at home. In 2015, the percentage of women giving birth at home is lower for women aged 25 and over and higher for the under 25's when compared with 2005 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Percentage of women within each age group giving birth at home, 2005 and 2015**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The percentage of women giving birth at home is reported within each age group. For example in 2015, 1.6% of all women aged 20 to 24 gave birth at home - this includes stillbirths.

In England 2.2% of women gave birth at home in 2015 while in Wales the figure was 2.8%. The South West was the region of England with the highest percentage of women giving birth at home; 3.1% in 2015, down from 3.2% in 2014. The North East had the lowest; 1.1% in 2015 unchanged from 2014. The South West and the North East have recorded the highest and lowest percentages respectively of women giving birth at home since 2002 when these figures were first published by region.

## 5. The small rise in the rate of women having multiple births has been driven by those aged 25 to 29

In 2015, there were 10,901 women who gave birth to twins, 169 to triplets and 3 to quads and above. These multiple maternities include both live births and stillbirths.

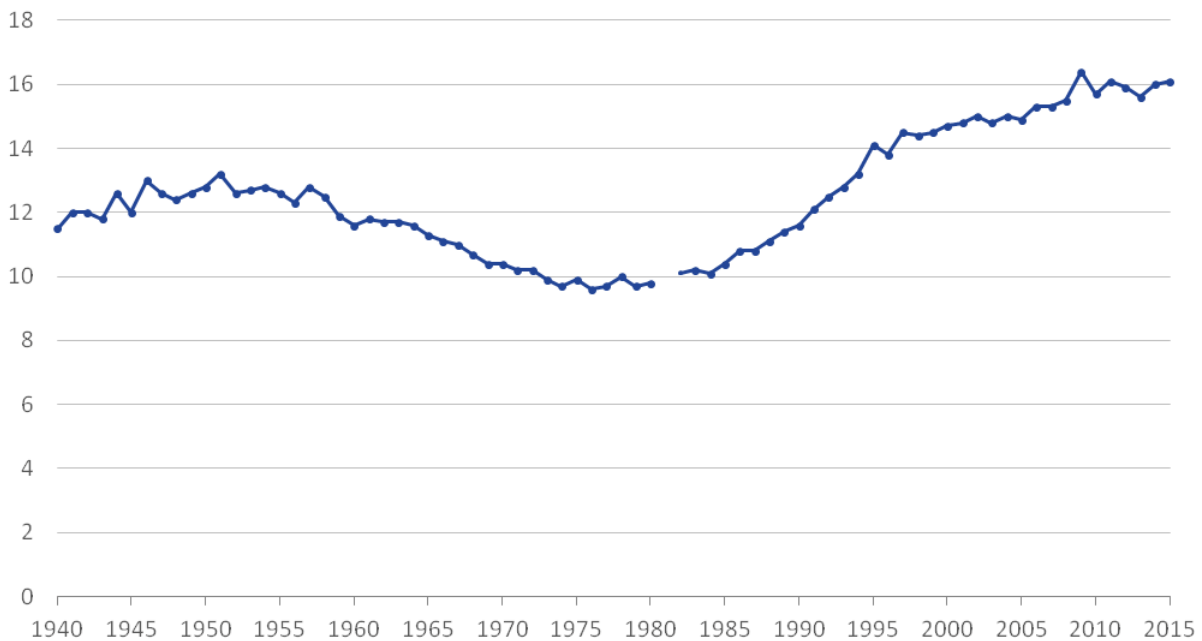
Although most multiple births occur naturally, many occur as a result of fertility treatment. On average multiple births tend to have lower birthweights than singletons, multiple pregnancies are also associated with a higher risk of stillbirth, [infant deaths](#) and child disability.

The multiple maternity rate in 2015 increased slightly to 16.1 per 1,000 women giving birth, compared with 16.0 in 2014. The largest increase in the multiple maternity rate was recorded between 1990 and 1995, when the rate increased by 22% from 11.6 to 14.1.

**Figure 3: Multiple maternity rate, 1940 to 2015**

**England and Wales**

Multiple maternities per 1,000 total maternities

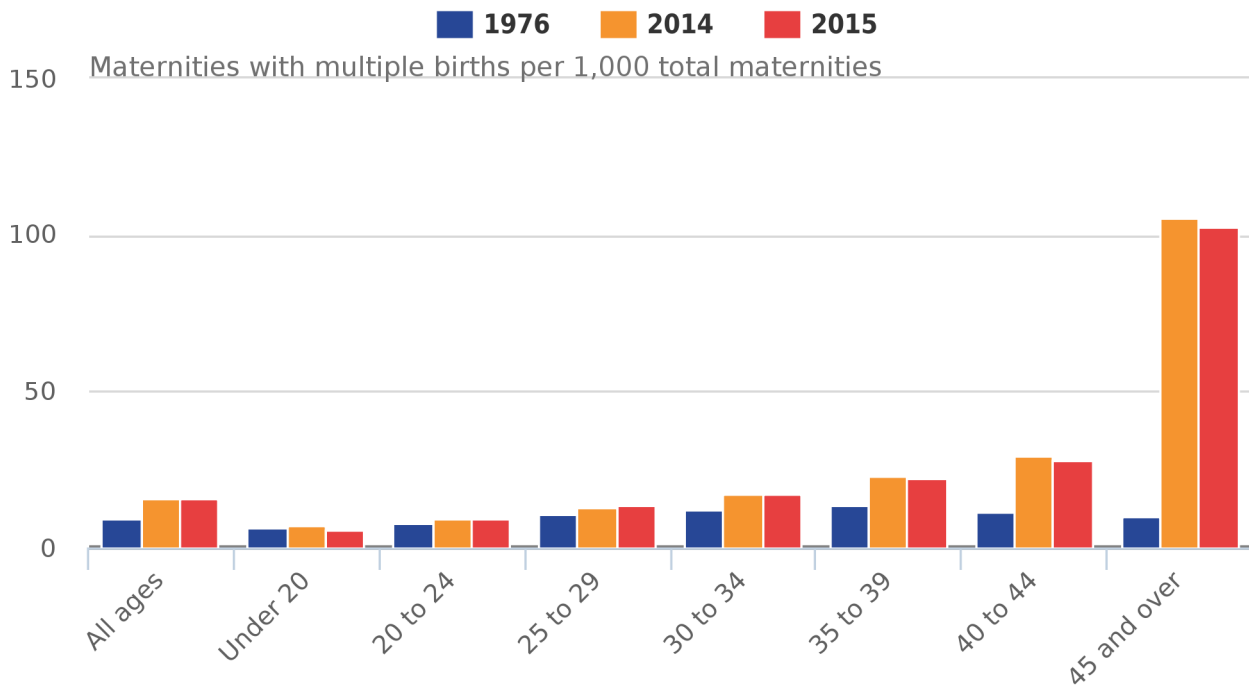


In 1976, when the multiple maternity rate was at a low of 9.6, women aged 35 to 39 had the highest multiple maternity rate - 13.4 per 1,000 maternities. Since 1993 however, women aged 45 and over have consistently recorded the highest multiple maternity rate; this is due to higher levels of assisted fertility treatments at these ages, including medicines which stimulate ovulation and assisted conception which includes In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

When comparing 2015 with 2014, the multiple maternity rate decreased slightly for women aged under 25 and 35 and over; the rate increased for women aged 25 to 29 and remained unchanged for those aged 30 to 34 (Figure 4). Consequently the overall rise in the multiple maternity rate has been driven by the increase in the rate for women aged 25 to 29.

**Figure 4: Women having multiple births by age of mother, 1976, 2014 and 2015**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

- 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.

On average, [1 in 10 IVF pregnancies are a multiple pregnancy](#), compared to 1 in 80 for women who conceive naturally. With approximately 19,000 IVF babies born in the UK in 2014, this contributes significantly to the multiple birth rate.

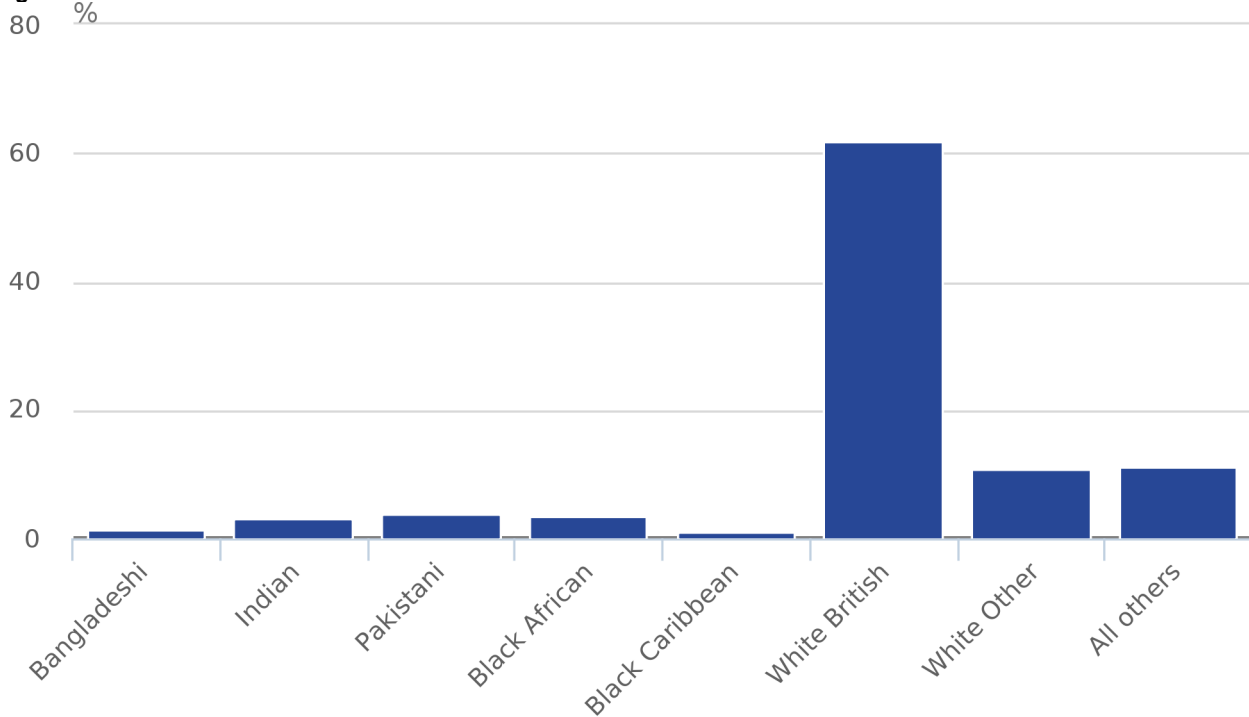
In January 2009, the HFEA introduced a policy to minimise the risk of multiple births from IVF treatment. This allowed centres to develop their own strategy - the aim was to reduce the UK IVF multiple pregnancy rate to 10% over a period of years.

## 6 . Gestational age varies by ethnicity

In 2015, the greatest percentage of all live births (62%) occurred in the White British group. The lowest percentages for all live births were for babies from the Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean groups with 1.4% and 0.9% of all live births respectively.

**Figure 5: Live births by ethnic group, 2015**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Ethnicity is the ethnicity of the baby. Excludes births where ethnicity was not stated.

The highest percentage of births before 37 weeks gestation occurred in the Black Caribbean ethnic group with 10.7% of births being classed as preterm. The White Other ethnic group has the lowest percentage of preterm births with 6.6% of live births occurring before 37 weeks gestation. More detailed data for live births by ethnicity and gestation are available in [table 7](#).

## 7 . Stillbirths reduce greatly as gestational age increases

In 2015, the stillbirth rate for England and Wales fell to 4.5 per 1,000 total births; the lowest rate since 1992 when it was 4.3. The [maternal and fetal risk factors for stillbirths](#) include maternal obesity, smoking, and fetal growth restriction. Stillbirth rates reduce greatly as gestational age increases. In 2015, the stillbirth rate for babies born at 24 weeks gestation was 356.0 stillbirths per 1,000 total births, this compares with a rate of 1.1 at 40 weeks gestation.

Women aged 45 and over had the highest stillbirth rate in 2015 with 12.7 stillbirths per 1,000 total births. This compares with a rate of 6.0 for women aged 40 to 44, and a rate of 5.2 for women aged under 20.

## 8 . Birthweight

Low birthweight (under 2.5kg), one of the known risk factors for infant deaths, can be caused by a number of factors including smoking; babies born to women who smoke weigh, on average, 200g less than babies born to non-smokers ([NHS, Stop smoking in pregnancy](#)).

In England and Wales, 7.0% (48,711) of live births were low birthweight in 2015, unchanged since 2011. In England, 7.0% of live births were of low birthweight compared with 6.8% in Wales.

The percentage of live births with low birthweight varies by region within England; West Midlands had the highest percentage of low birthweight babies (8.6%); the East and South East had the lowest percentage (6.2%). The percentage of live births under 2.5kg is also available by local authority: [Births by area of usual residence](#).

Babies born weighing more than 4kg are considered to be of high birthweight. In 2015, 11.1% of live births in England and Wales weighed 4kg and above. In England 11.0% weighed 4kg and above, while in Wales the figure was 11.8%.

The South West had the highest percentage of live births with a high birthweight (12.6%), while London had the lowest (8.9%). Gestational diabetes and a BMI over 30 in the mother are some of the risk factors for babies that are large for gestational age ([NHS. Overweight and pregnant](#)).

## 9 . Links to related ONS statistics

More data on births in England and Wales by [birth characteristics](#) (stillbirths, home births, hospital births, multiple births, birthweight, gestational age and ethnicity) 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 Reference tables](#), international comparisons of live birth rates are also available.

[An overview of stillbirth numbers and rates in England and Wales since 1927 and a European comparison](#) was published in September 2015 and further statistics on stillbirths, including figures by cause group, birthweight and pregnancy and ethnic factors can be found in [Child Mortality Statistics](#).

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

## 10 . Quality and methodology



1. This publication provides statistics on stillbirths, birthweight, gestational age and ethnicity, women giving birth at home and women having multiple births. 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:
  - birthweight and mother's area of usual residence (only live births by low birthweight have previously been published)
  - gestational age and ethnicity
  - age of parents and quarter of occurrence for stillbirth
  - quarter and month for live births
  - place of birth
  - multiple maternities
  - maternities, live births, and stillbirths in hospitals by area of occurrence
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, 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. 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.
8. Statistics on home births show the number of women giving birth at home, rather than the number of babies born at home.
9. A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of 1 or more children, including stillbirths. Multiple births arising from a single pregnancy are counted as 1 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).
10. Ethnicity is not collected at birth registration. The statistics in this report have been derived by linking birth notifications to birth registrations. Ethnicity of the baby, as stated by the mother, is recorded on [birth notifications](#).