

Statistical bulletin

# Births in England and Wales: 2016

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



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# 1 . Main points

- There were 696,271 live births in England and Wales in 2016, a decrease of 0.2% from 2015.
- In 2016, the total fertility rate (TFR) decreased to 1.81 children per woman, from 1.82 in 2015.
- The average age of mothers in 2016 increased to 30.4 years, compared with 30.3 years in 2015.
- Women aged 40 and over had a higher fertility rate than women aged under 20 for the second time since 1947.
- Over a quarter (28.2%) of live births in 2016 were to mothers born outside the UK, the highest level on record.
- In 2016, the stillbirth rate decreased to 4.4 per 1,000 total births, the lowest rate since 1992.

## 2 . Statistician's comment

"The percentage of babies born outside of marriage or civil partnership in 2016 was 48%; of these, two-thirds had parents who lived together. The percentage of births outside of marriage or civil partnership has remained relatively unchanged since 2012, following a notable increase from 5% in the mid-1950s. This increase coincided with cohabitation becoming more common as an alternative to marriage, particularly at younger 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:

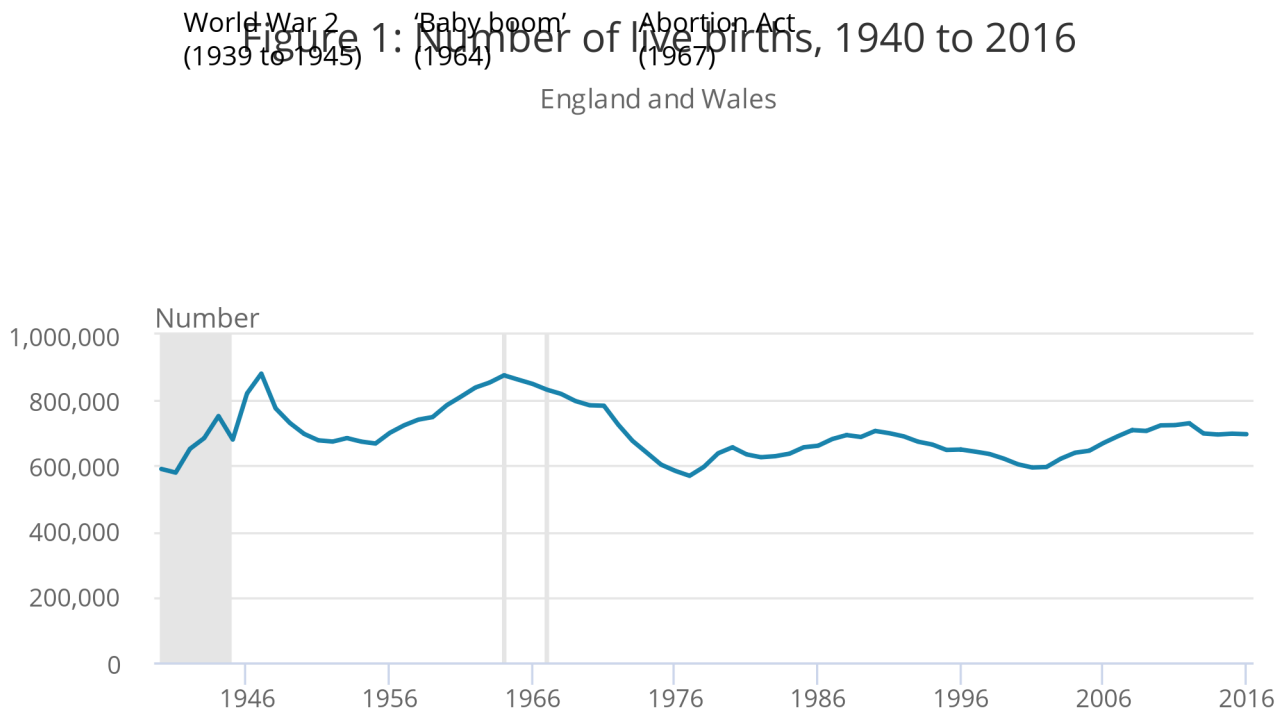
- birth statistics represent births that occurred in England and Wales in the calendar year, but include a very small number of late registrations from the previous year
- figures are compiled from information supplied when births are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement

## 4 . Live births decreased slightly in 2016

There were 696,271 live births in England and Wales in 2016, a small decrease of 0.2% compared with 697,852 in 2015. The number of live births has fluctuated, following a 4.3% decrease between 2012 and 2013; the largest percentage annual decrease since 1975 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of live births, 1940 to 2016**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year.

The total fertility rate (TFR) for England and Wales decreased slightly in 2016 to an average of 1.81 children per woman from 1.82 in 2015. The number of births and the TFR in 2016 remain relatively high compared with the last four decades. The TFR provides a timely measure of fertility levels; it can be affected by changes in the timing of childbearing, as well as changes in completed family size (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Total fertility rate (TFR), 1940 to 2016**

England and Wales

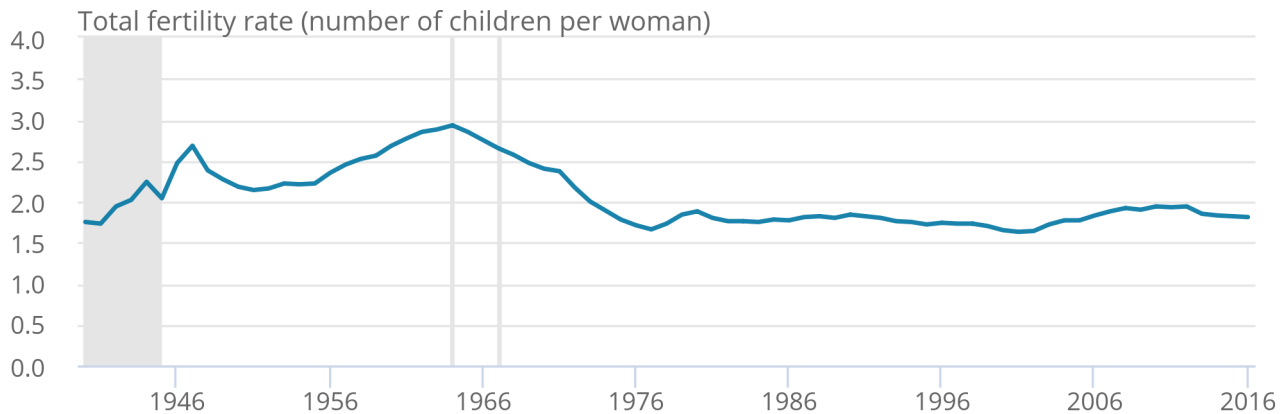
World War 2  
(1939 to 1945)

'Baby boom'  
(1964)

Abortion Act  
(1967)

**Figure 2: Total fertility rate (TFR), 1940 to 2016**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year.

## 5 . Fertility rates for women aged 30 and over continue their long-term rise

In 2016, fertility rates for women aged 30 and over increased compared with 2015; this continues the long-term rise in fertility rates for women at these ages since the mid-1970s.

The fertility rate for women aged 40 and over has now trebled since 1990 and is at its highest level since 1949. The fertility rate for women aged 35 to 39 has trebled since 1980 and is now at its highest ever level since the beginning of the time series in 1938.

Fertility rates for women aged under 30 decreased compared with 2015. Fertility rates in both the under 20 and 20 to 24 age groups are now at their lowest ever level since the beginning of the time series in 1938 (Figure 3).

The largest percentage decrease in fertility rates in 2016 was for women aged under 20 (5.5%); the largest percentage increase was for women aged 40 and over (4.6%). In 2015 and 2016, the fertility rate for women aged 40 and over exceeded the rate for women aged under 20; this pattern was last recorded in 1947.

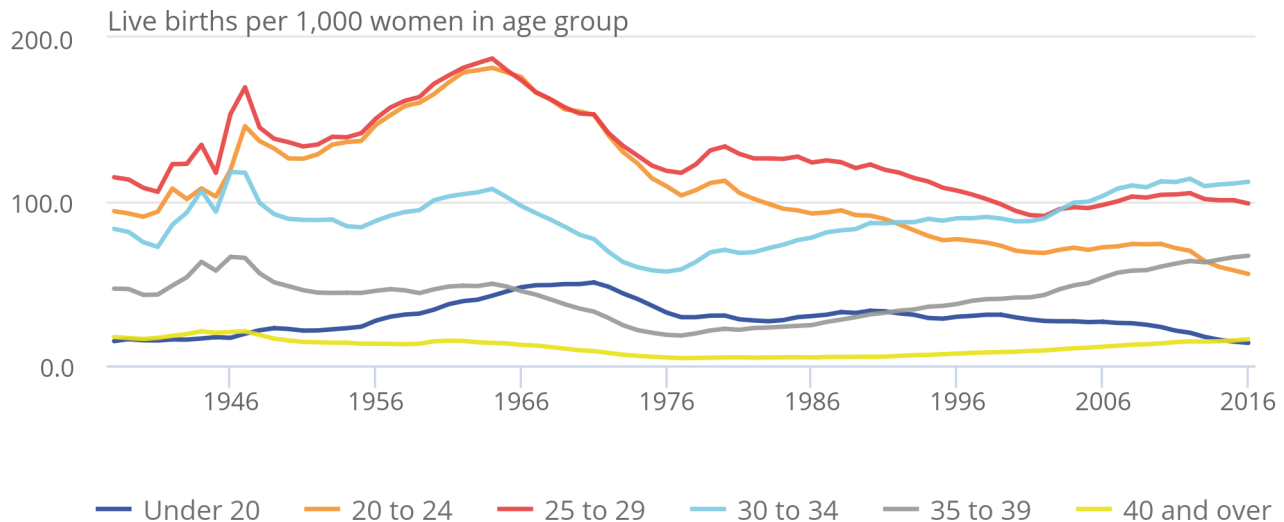
Since 2004 women aged 30 to 34 have had the highest fertility of any age group; prior to this women aged 25 to 29 had the highest fertility.

**Figure 3: Age-specific fertility rates, 1938 to 2016**

England and Wales

Figure 3: Age-specific fertility rates, 1938 to 2016

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Based on live births occurring in each calendar year.
2. The rates for women under 20 and 40 and over are based on the female population aged 15 to 19 and 40 to 44 respectively.
3. Age-specific fertility rates for 1981 are based on a 10% sample due to the late submission of some birth registrations due to 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 to 2016.

In most developed countries, women have been increasingly delaying childbearing to later in life, which has resulted in rising fertility rates among older women. This may be due to a number of factors such as increased female participation in higher education and the labour force, the increasing importance of a career, the rising costs of childbearing, labour market uncertainty and housing factors.

Rising fertility rates at older ages have affected the average age of mothers', which has been increasing since 1975, reaching 30.4 years in 2016.

## 6 . Two-thirds of babies born outside marriage or civil partnership have parents who live together

The percentage of births outside marriage or civil partnership declined very slightly in 2016 to 47.6% from 47.7% in 2015. Many of the babies born outside of marriage or civil partnership have parents who live together. Since 1998, over 60% of all births registered outside marriage or civil partnership each year have been to a cohabiting couple; in 2016 the figure was 67%. This is consistent with increases in the number of couples cohabiting rather than entering into marriage or civil partnership ([Families and households](#) provides further information).

The percentage of births outside marriage or civil partnership has remained relatively unchanged since 2012, following a notable increase from 5% in the mid-1950s.

## 7 . The percentage of live births to non-UK-born mothers continues to rise

The percentage of live births in England and Wales to mothers born outside the UK continued to rise in 2016, reaching 28.2%; this percentage has increased every year since 1990, when it was 11.6%.

In recent years, the percentage of births to women born outside the UK has been higher than the percentage of the female population of childbearing age born outside the UK. There are two reasons for this:

- fertility levels are generally higher among foreign-born women
- the foreign-born and UK-born female populations of reproductive age have different age structures, with a higher proportion of foreign-born women being aged from 25 to 34, where fertility is highest

## 8 . Fertility rates can vary considerably between areas

In 2016, the East of England and the West Midlands were the regions of England with the highest total fertility rate (TFR), with 1.91 children per woman. The North East and London had the lowest TFR, 1.72 children per woman.

Among the local authorities in England in 2016, City of London had the lowest TFR (0.75), Barking and Dagenham had the highest (2.47). The TFR for the City of London is based on a small number of women so should be interpreted with some caution. In Wales in 2016, Cardiff had the lowest TFR (1.59), Denbighshire had the highest (2.09). The interactive map below shows how fertility rates for local authority areas have changed since 2001.

### How have local levels of fertility changed since 2001?

#### TFRs by local authority district, 2001 to 2016, England and Wales

Fertility rates can vary considerably between subnational areas for a wide variety of reasons. These include variations in the composition of the population living in each area and social, economic and cultural differences. For example:

- a large student population within a local authority often acts to reduce overall fertility in that area, as students in higher education tend to have below-average fertility
- women born in certain countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and African countries tend to have above-average fertility
- fertility rates for some local authorities are based on relatively small populations – such calculations are often subject to random fluctuations and are consequently less robust

## **9 . Number of live births in the UK decreases**

The provisional number of live births in the UK in 2016 was 774,849; a decrease of 0.3% compared with 2015.

In Scotland the number of live births decreased by 1.1% in 2016 (provisional figure); there was a slightly smaller fall of 0.5% in Northern Ireland (provisional figure).

## **10 . The number of stillbirths decreased in 2016**

The number of stillbirths in England and Wales fell by 1.1% to 3,112 in 2016, from 3,147 in 2015. The stillbirth rate takes into account the total number of births (live and stillbirths), so provides a more accurate indication of trends than just analysing the number of stillbirths over time. In 2016, the stillbirth rate for England and Wales fell to 4.4 per 1,000 total births; the lowest rate since 1992 when it was 4.3.

In England, the stillbirth rate in 2016 was 4.3 per 1,000 total births, down from 4.4 in 2015. There has been a general downward trend in the stillbirth rate over the last 10 years with a decrease of 19% since 2006 (Figure 3).

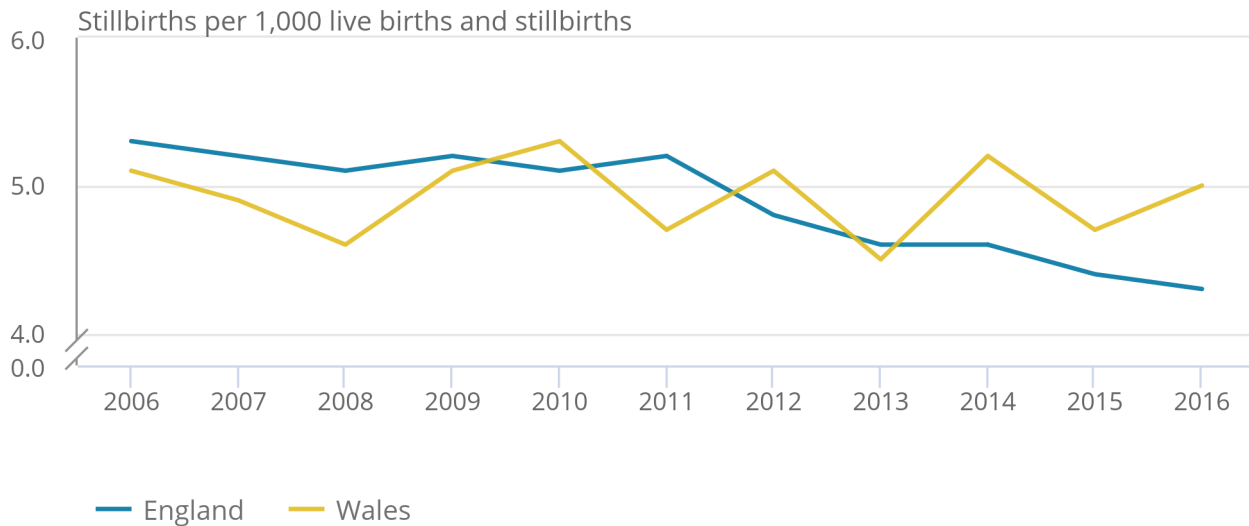
In Wales, the stillbirth rate in 2016 was 5.0 per 1,000 total births, up from 4.7 in 2015. The small number of stillbirths in Wales means the rate can fluctuate.

**Figure 4: Stillbirth rates, 2006 to 2016**

England and Wales

Figure 4: Stillbirth rates, 2006 to 2016

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Based on live births and stillbirths occurring in each calendar year.

## 11 . Proposed changes to annual birth statistics

We are planning to change the way in which birth statistics are published from the 2017 data year onwards. We plan to make explorable datasets for live births available in [NOMIS](#) - these will provide detailed birth statistics; [marriage, divorce and mortality data](#) are currently available as explorable datasets. We plan to make four explorable datasets available for live births; the specification for these and consequential proposed changes to our annual publication tables are detailed in our consultation [Proposed changes to ONS birth statistics](#). We welcome feedback on these proposals and will take account of all feedback received before making any changes.

## 12 . Links to related statistics

More detailed statistics on [births](#) and [deaths](#) in England and Wales in 2016 are available on our website.

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](#).



[How popular is your birthday](#) uses birth data from 1994 to 2014 to determine the most popular birthdays.

[Childbearing by socio-economic status and country of birth of mother: 2014](#) explores the relationship between the socio-economic classification of women and their fertility and, in particular, examines how this differs for UK-born women compared with non-UK-born women.

[International comparisons of teenage births](#) showed the birth rate for women aged 15 to 19 has been decreasing across Europe since 2004.

[Why has the fertility rate risen over the last decade in England and Wales?](#) provides possible reasons for the rising fertility rates recorded between 2001 and 2012.

[Childbearing of UK and non-UK born women living in the UK, 2011 Census data](#) examines fertility rates for foreign-born women within England and Wales (around 150 different countries analysed).

Further 2016 birth statistics will be published later in 2017; see the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) for more details.

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

## 13 . Quality and methodology

This is the first time that annual birth statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2016. This release provides summary figures; detailed statistics are published in themed packages between August and December.

1. 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.
2. The [Births Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:
  - the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
  - uses and users of the data
  - how the output was created
  - the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data
3. Our [User Guide to Birth Statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to births and includes a glossary of terms.
4. 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.
5. The [Revisions policy for population statistics \(including birth statistics\)](#) is available on our website.
6. The total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of live children that a group of women would each have if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates of the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lives. It provides a timely measure of the current intensity of childbearing. Our [User Guide to Birth Statistics](#) provides further information.
7. The average age of mother has been standardised to eliminate the impact of changes in the distribution of the population by age, enabling analysis of trends over time. The figure is therefore calculated using fertility rates per 1,000 female population by single year of age.
8. 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.