

Statistical bulletin

# Births in England and Wales: 2018

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



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# 1 . Main points

- There were 657,076 live births in England and Wales in 2018, a decrease of 3.2% since 2017 and a 9.9% decrease since the most recent peak in 2012.
- The total fertility rate (TFR) decreased from 1.76 to 1.70 children per woman in 2018; this is lower than all previous years except 1977 and 1999 to 2002.
- The crude birth rate (CBR) decreased from 11.6 to 11.1 live births per 1,000 total population in 2018; this is the lowest rate since records began in 1938.
- Fertility rates decreased in all age groups except for women aged 40 years and over, where the rate remained at 16.1 births per 1,000 women of this age.
- The proportion of live births to non-UK born mothers fell for the first time since 1990, from 28.4% to 28.2%.
- The stillbirth rate reached a record low for the second year running in 2018, with 4.1 stillbirths per 1,000 total births.

## 2 . Statistician's comment

“Our analysis of births in England and Wales in 2018 paints a picture of decreases and some record lows. The birth rate was the lowest ever recorded, when births are measured as a proportion of the total population. The total fertility rate stood at 1.70 children per woman, lower than all years except 1977 and 1999 to 2002. The proportion of live births to non-UK mothers fell for the first time since 1990. The stillbirth rate reached the lowest level recorded for the second year running. There were 657,076 live births last year, the fewest since 2005 and a drop of almost 10% since 2012.”

Kathryn Littleboy, 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 . The number of births, crude birth and total fertility rates decreased in 2018

The number of live births in England and Wales decreased for the third year in a row. In 2018, there were 657,076 live births, a 3.2% decrease from 679,106 live births in 2017. The number of live births has not been this low since 2005 and has dropped by 9.9% compared with 2012.

In 2018, the crude birth rate (CBR) was the lowest since records began, at 11.1 live births per 1,000 population of all ages. The CBR has decreased by 45.9% compared with 1947 when it was at its peak. The CBR takes no account of the structure of the population such as age and sex. The record low is driven primarily by falling fertility rates, but could be exaggerated by the [ageing population](#) where the proportion of older people compared with women of childbearing ages is increasing.

The total fertility rate (TFR) provides a better measure than simply looking at the number of live births or CBR. TFRs account for the size and age structure of the female population of childbearing age, which affects the number of births.

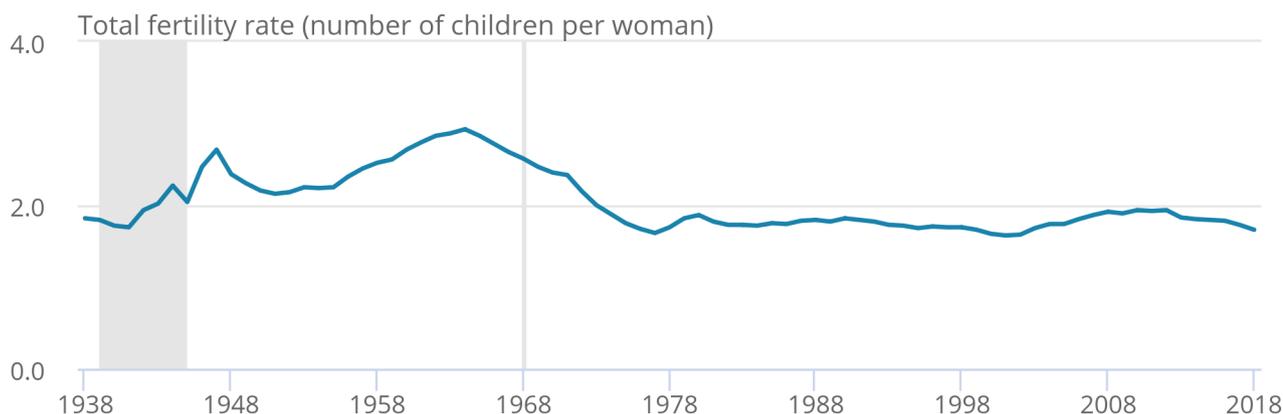
The TFR is now lower than all previous years except 1977 and 1999 to 2002. In 2018, the total fertility rate (TFR) in England and Wales fell to 1.70 children per woman, a 3.4% decrease compared with 2017. TFRs have been decreasing each year since 2012 (Figure 1). The TFR provides a timely measure of fertility levels and can be affected by changes in the timing of childbearing, [completed family size](#) and the population structure.

**Figure 1: Total fertility rate (TFR) decreased for the sixth year in a row**

TFR, England and Wales, 1938 to 2018

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TFR, England and Wales, 1938 to 2018



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.

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

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

## 5 . Fertility rates decreased for all ages except for women aged 40 years and over

Fertility rates for women aged 40 years and over have generally increased since the late 1970s until 2017. However, in 2018, the fertility rate for this age group remained the same as 2017, at 16.1 births per 1,000 women aged 40 years and over. This ended a four-year period of consecutive increases and was the only age group for which the fertility rate did not decrease in 2018.

In contrast, since the turn of the century, there has been a long-term decrease in fertility rates for women aged under 20 years (Figure 2). This trend continued in 2018, when the fertility rate for this age group decreased by 6.3% compared with 2017, to 11.9 births per 1,000 women aged under 20 years.

Women aged 30 to 34 years have had the highest fertility rate of any age group since 2004. Prior to this, women aged 25 to 29 years generally had the highest fertility rate (Figure 2). This indicates women are progressively delaying childbearing to older ages. Reasons for this could include:

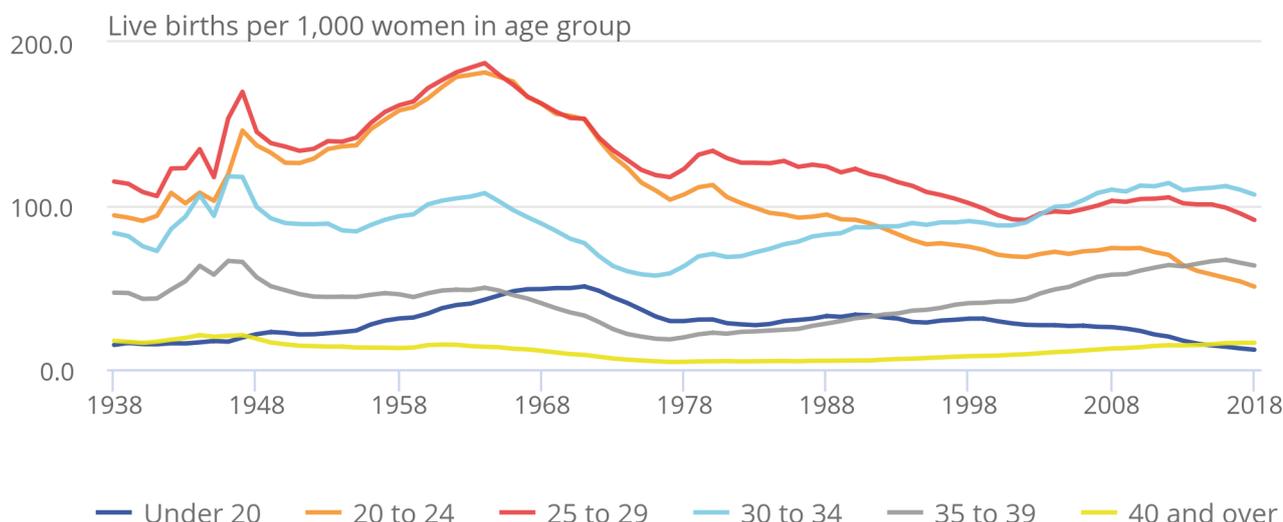
- [greater participation in higher education](#)
- [delaying marriage and/or partnership formation](#)
- [wanting to have a longer working career before starting a family](#) (PDF, 540KB)
- [labour market uncertainty and the threat of unemployment](#)

**Figure 2: Fertility rates for women aged under 20 years have decreased since the turn of the century**

Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1938 to 2018

## Figure 2: Fertility rates for women aged under 20 years have decreased since the turn of the century

Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1938 to 2018



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 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.
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 onwards.

## 6 . The percentage of live births to non-UK born mothers fell for the first time since 1990

The percentage of live births in England and Wales to mothers born outside the UK decreased from 28.4% in 2017, to 28.2% in 2018. Though the decrease was small, this was the first decrease since 1990, and is in the context of declining fertility rates. Despite this recent decrease, the percentage of live births to non-UK born mothers has more than doubled since records began in 1969, from 11.7% to 28.2% in 2018.

## 7 . Biggest decrease in the rate of live births within marriage since 1973

In 2018, there were 80.5 live births within marriage per 1,000 married women aged 15 to 44 years, which was a 5.8% decrease compared with 2017. This was the largest percentage decrease in the rate since 1973.

Meanwhile 48.4% of live births were outside of marriage in 2018. This continues the long-term increases in the percentage of live births outside of marriage, since the 1960s. Conceptions in England and Wales have also shown a similar trend where [most conceptions in 2017 occurred outside marriage or civil partnership](#). This suggests a cultural change in [people's attitudes towards having children and marriage](#).

## 8 . Stillbirth rate decreased to the lowest rate recorded

In 2018, the number of stillbirths in England and Wales fell by 6.4% compared with 2017, to 2,689. However, stillbirth rates are a better measure of trends over time, rather than simply looking at the numbers. Stillbirth rates account for the number of stillbirths as a proportion of total births.

The stillbirth rate in England and Wales fell to 4.1 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2018, a 2.4% decrease compared with the previous year. For the second year running the stillbirth rate reached an all-time low since records began in 1927. This continues a downward trend in stillbirths (Figure 3), where the stillbirth rate has decreased by 89.3% since 1927.

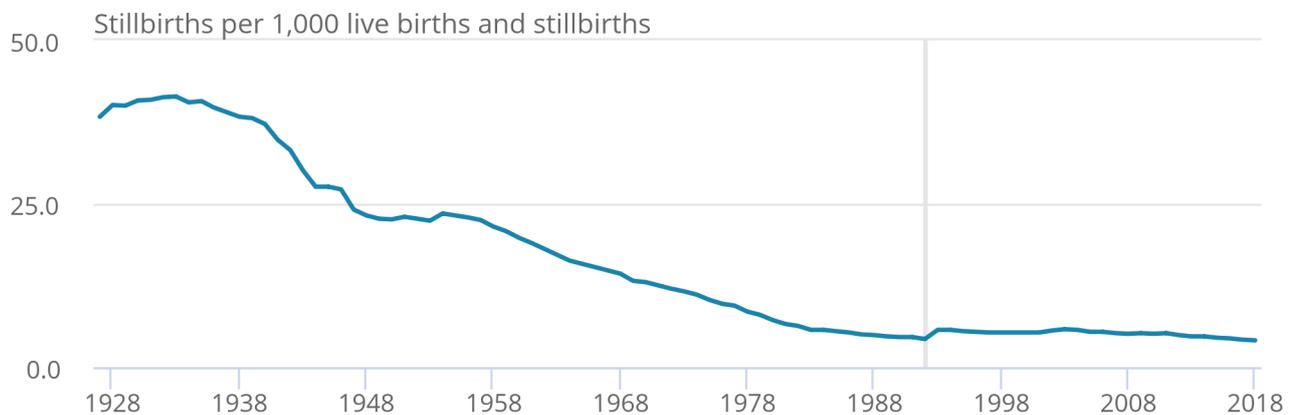
**Figure 3: Long-term decline in stillbirth rate continued in 2018**

Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1927 to 2018

Figure 3: Long-term decline in stillbirth rate continued in 2018

Change in stillbirth definition<sup>2</sup>

Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1927 to 2018



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 Stillbirth (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 50% in England by 2025. 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, was 5.1 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2010 and 4.0 in 2018. By 2025, the stillbirth rate for England needs to [decrease to 2.6 stillbirths per 1,000 total births](#) if the government ambition is to be met.

## 9 . Regional and local level fertility rates vary

The total fertility rate (TFR) in England was 1.70 children per woman in 2018, a decrease of 3.4% compared with 2017. The TFR in Wales was lower, with 1.63 children per woman, a decrease of 3.6% compared with the previous year.

TFRs decreased among all English regions compared with 2017, but remained highest in the East of England, where there were 1.81 children per woman. The North East remained the region with the lowest TFR, with 1.58 children per woman. However, the biggest decrease from 2017 (4.6%) was seen in the East Midlands. Table 1 details the TFRs in all English regions.

Table 1: Regional changes in total fertility rates (TFR) between 2017 and 2018, England

Region	Total Fertility Rate (TFR)		
	2017	2018	Percentage change
East	1.86	1.81	-2.7%
West Midlands	1.83	1.76	-3.8%
South East	1.79	1.74	-2.8%
North West	1.79	1.73	-3.4%
Yorkshire and the Humber	1.76	1.69	-4.0%
East Midlands	1.75	1.67	-4.6%
South West	1.73	1.66	-4.0%
London	1.70	1.63	-4.1%
North East	1.64	1.58	-3.7%

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. [Back to table](#)
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. [Back to table](#)

When looking at fertility rates for areas with small populations, it is important to consider the numbers involved. 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.

The interactive map (Figure 4) shows that TFRs have decreased in 79.9% of local authorities across England and Wales compared with 2017. In 2018, London contained the local authorities with both the lowest and highest TFRs. For the fourth year running, Barking and Dagenham had the highest TFR at 2.28 children per woman. Meanwhile Camden had the lowest TFR for the fifth year in a row at 1.10 children per woman.

#### Figure 4: Between 2017 and 2018 total fertility rates (TFRs) decreased in the majority of local authorities

#### TFRs by local authority district, England and Wales, 2001 to 2018

## 10 . Recent decreases in fertility rates can be observed internationally

The latest birth statistics available for international comparisons are for 2017. Since the beginning of the decade, the [total fertility rates \(TFR\) have generally been decreasing](#) in each of the four constituent countries of the UK, a trend that continued for England and Wales in 2018.

This pattern is not exclusive to the UK, as a similar declining trend can also be seen across other countries such as Australia and France over the past eight years (Figure 5). Though the TFRs in India and Pakistan are higher than the UK, they too have been decreasing.

The TFRs for the European Union (28 member states) as a whole, and some countries within, such as Italy, have remained relatively stable, at lower levels than the UK. Meanwhile the TFRs for Germany and Poland have generally been increasing in recent years, though that increase has been from a much lower level than the UK. Despite these slight [international differences](#), the TFRs for all these countries, with the exception of Poland, decreased between 2016 and 2017.

### Figure 5: International total fertility rates (TFRs) show similar trends to the UK

#### TFRs by country, 2010 to 2017

##### Notes:

1. [UK TFRs taken from annual UK and constituent country figures for births](#)
2. [Australia TFRs taken from Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
3. [TFRs for France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the European Union taken from Eurostat](#)
4. [TFRs for India and Pakistan taken from the World Bank Group](#)

[Download the data](#)

## 11 . Links to related statistics

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

Five [explorable datasets](#) providing more detailed birth statistics are available alongside this first release of annual births data. These explorable datasets include statistics based on characteristics of mother and father, as well as live birth figures for small geographical areas such as Lower Layer Super Output Areas and wards. These explorable datasets have been specially designed to protect the confidentiality of individuals.

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](#). Figures for 2018 are due to be published in October to November 2019.

Eurostat data have been compiled for [Live birth rates to women aged under 18 and under 20 years in EU28 countries, 2007, 2016 and 2017](#).

Possible reasons for the rising fertility rate between 2001 and 2012 are discussed in [Why has the fertility rate risen over the last decade in England and Wales?](#)

[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 2018 birth statistics will be published later in 2019; 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.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gov.uk) or telephone on +44 (0)1329 444110. [User requested data](#) will be published.

## 12 . Quality and methodology

This is the first time that annual birth statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2018. This release provides summary figures; more detailed data on live births in England and Wales in 2018 have also been published in [five explorable datasets](#). Further birth statistics are published in themed releases between August and December.

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.

The [Births Quality and Methodology Information](#) report 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

Our [User guide to birth statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to births and includes a glossary of terms.

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 [Births Quality and Methodology Information](#).

The [revisions policy for population statistics \(including birth statistics\)](#) is available.

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.

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.

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.