

Statistical bulletin

# Births in England and Wales: 2021

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



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Release date:  
9 August 2022

Next release:  
July to August 2023 (provisional)

## Correction

**11 August 2022 14:45**

We have corrected an error in [Section 2: Main points](#). The previous version read "but still below the 2019 figure (657,076)." It should have read "but still below the 2019 figure (640,370)."

# Notice

**19 January 2023**

Mid-2021 population estimates were not available at the time of publication of this statistical bulletin therefore fertility rates were calculated using 2018-based population projections. We have [now revised the 2021 fertility rates using the provisional 2021 mid-year estimates](#) (19 January 2023). These revised fertility rates differ from those reported in this statistical bulletin which has not been updated.

We will update time series data presented in this statistical bulletin and the tables in our next release when the revised 2012 to 2021 mid-year estimates are available.

# Table of contents

1. [Other birth outputs in this release](#)
2. [Main points](#)
3. [Live births and fertility rates](#)
4. [Stillbirths](#)
5. [Fertility rates by geographic area](#)
6. [Births data](#)
7. [Glossary](#)
8. [Measuring the data](#)
9. [Strengths and limitations](#)
10. [Related links](#)

# 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: 2021](#)

## 2 . Main points

- There were 624,828 live births in England and Wales in 2021, an increase of 1.8% from 613,936 in 2020, but still below the 2019 figure (640,370); 2021 remains in line with the long-term trend of decreasing live births seen before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- The total fertility rate (TFR) increased to 1.61 children per woman in 2021 from 1.58 in 2020; the first time TFR has risen since 2012.
- Fertility rates increased overall; however, younger age groups saw declining fertility rates while older age groups saw fertility rates increase.
- There were 2,597 stillbirths in 2021, an increase of 226 from 2020; this is similar to the 2,522 stillbirths in 2019.
- The stillbirth rate in 2021 increased to 4.1 stillbirths per 1,000 total births compared with 3.8 in 2020; this is also higher than the rate seen before the coronavirus pandemic in 2019 (3.9).

Delays in birth registrations because of the coronavirus pandemic have affected 2020 and 2021 data. See [Section 8: Measuring the data](#)

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### 3 . Live births and fertility rates

For the first time since 2015, the number of live births in England and Wales increased annually. In 2021, there were 624,828 live births, an increase of 1.8% compared with 2020 (613,936). However, the number of live births in 2021 is lower than the number of pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) births in 2019 and is in line with the long-term trend of decreasing live births.

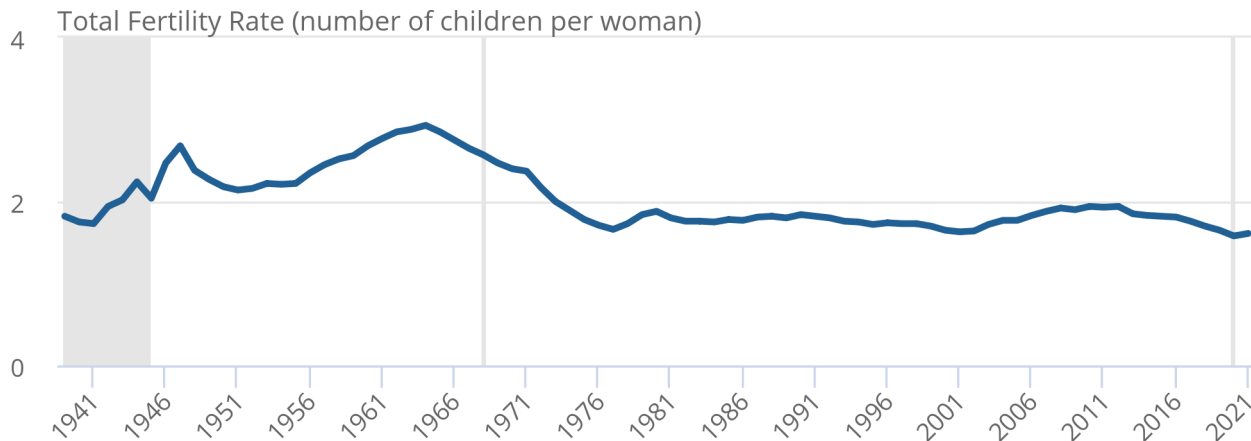
The [total fertility rate \(TFR\)](#) for England and Wales in 2021 rose to 1.61 children per woman. This is the first annual increase since 2012. The TFR is 1.9% higher than in 2020 (1.58), but 2.4% lower than in 2019.

**Figure 1: Total Fertility Rate (TFR) increased slightly in 2021**

Total Fertility Rate, England and Wales, 1939 to 2021

Figure 1: Total Fertility Rate (TFR) increased slightly in 2021

World War 2 (1939 to 1945)      Abortion Act came into force in 1968      The covid pandemic in 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 our [2020 Births release](#), the TFR has been below replacement level since 1973 and TFRs have been decreasing year on year since 2012 (Figure 1).

Fertility rates increased overall in 2021, with the [general fertility rate \(GFR\)](#) rising to 55.8 births per 1,000 women in 2021, from 55.1 in 2020. Our [provisional births data](#) show how the GFR has varied over the pandemic period on a monthly basis.

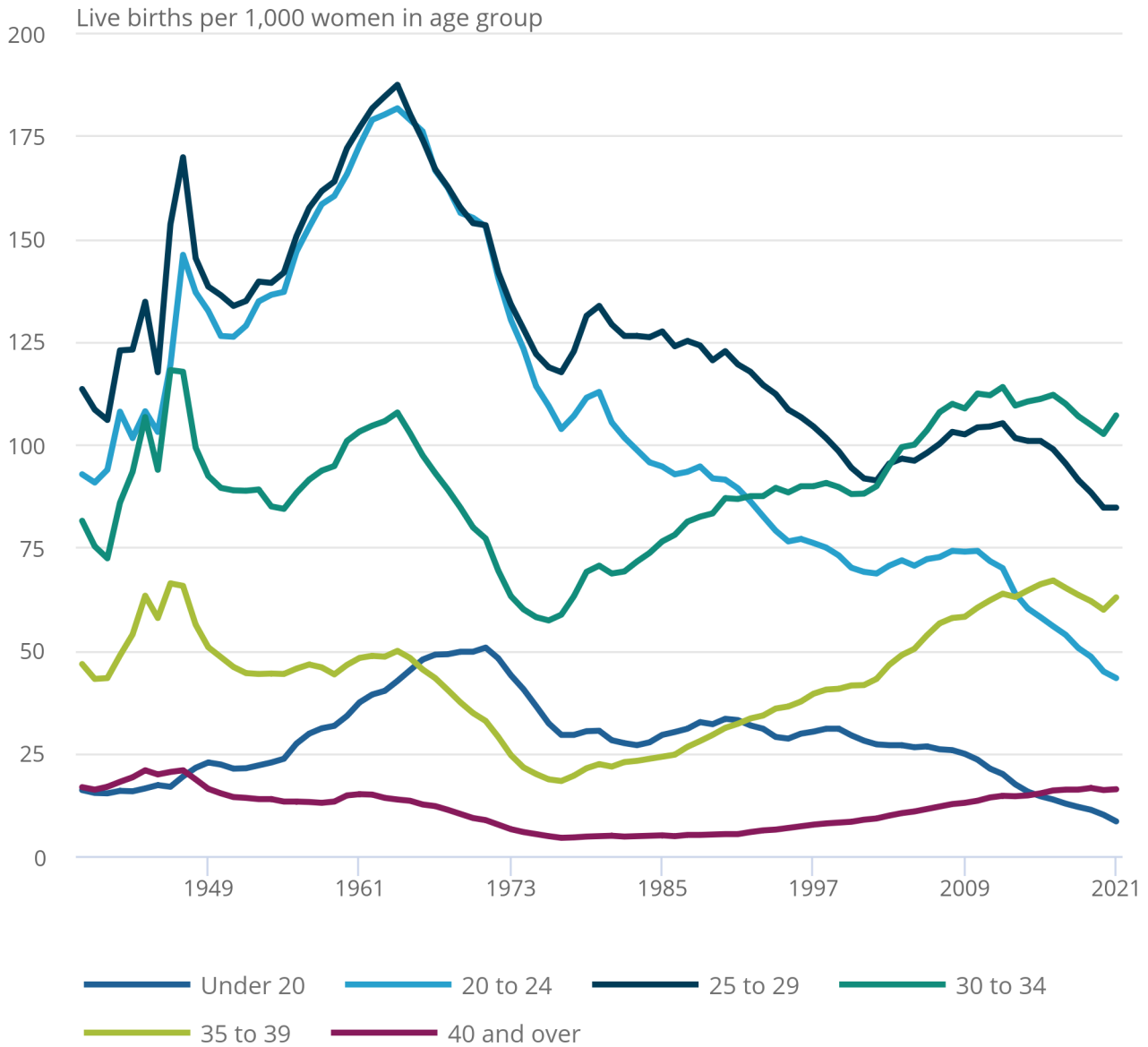
However, when broken down by age groups, [age-specific fertility rates \(ASFRs\)](#) have increased in older age groups but decreased in younger age groups. The largest decrease was seen among those aged under 20 years (16%), whereas older women, aged 35 to 39 years, saw fertility rates increase by 5% (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: In 2021, the overall increase in fertility has been driven by women at older ages when compared to 2020**

Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1939 to 2021

Figure 2: In 2021, the overall increase in fertility has been driven by women at older ages when compared to 2020

Age-specific fertility rates, England and Wales, 1939 to 2021



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

Notes:

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

## 4 . Stillbirths

There were 2,597 stillbirths in England and Wales in 2021. This is a 9.5% increase compared with 2020 and similar to the 2,522 stillbirths seen pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) in 2019.

The stillbirth rate increased to 4.1 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2021, from 3.8 in 2020. This is higher than the pre-coronavirus rate (3.9 stillbirths per 1,000 total births) in 2019 (Figure 3). Further information on how stillbirth rates varied by month over the pandemic period can be found in the [Provisional births 2021](#) release.

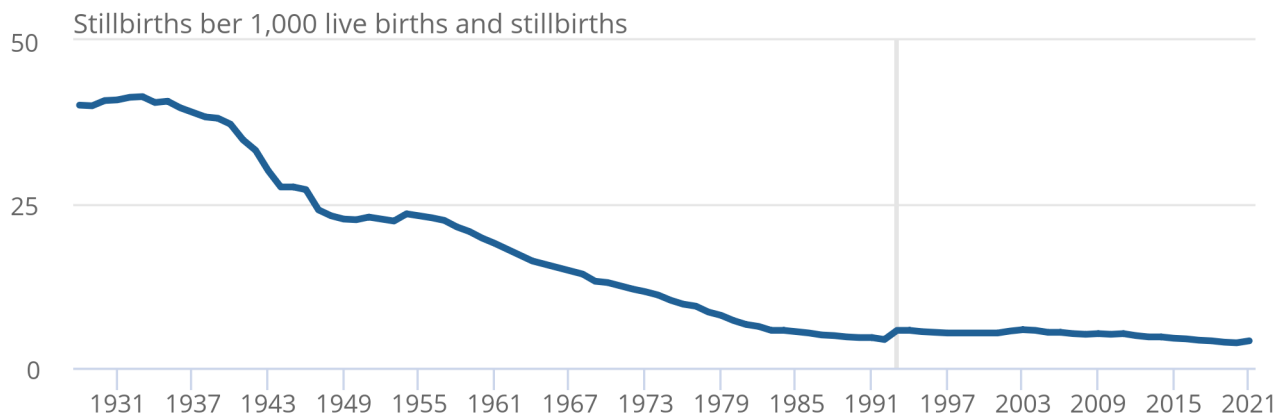
**Figure 3: Stillbirth rate increased in 2021**

Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1928 to 2021

Figure 3: Stillbirth rate increased in 2021

Change in stillbirth definition<sup>1</sup>

Stillbirth rates, England and Wales, 1928 to 2021



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](#).

## 5 . Fertility rates by geographic area

The total fertility rate (TFR) for England was 1.62 children per woman in 2021, increasing from 1.59 in 2020, an increase of 1.9%. Wales had a lower TFR, with 1.49 children per woman in 2021, the first annual increase in TFR in three years.

Fertility rates increased across all regions of England in 2021, except for London and the West Midlands. The region with the highest TFR was the East of England, with 1.76 births per 1,000 women, an increase from 1.69 in 2020.

## Figure 4: Total fertility rate (TFR) by local authority district, England and Wales, 2001 to 2021

### 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 2022.
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 the data

[.xlsx](#)

## 6 . Births data

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

Dataset | Released 9 August 2022

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, 2021 data will be added as soon as it is available:

- [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 and 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 caused by 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.

## 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.

## General fertility rate (GFR)

The number of live births in a year per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years. Measure of current fertility levels.

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

# 8 . Measuring the data

Our data are for live births and stillbirths occurring in each calendar year, plus late registrations for the previous year. Because of delays in birth registrations caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020, the number of late registrations from the previous year included in the 2021 dataset was higher than usual but still accounted for less than 1% of all births and does not affect the headline trends discussed. 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 (QMI) on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in our [Birth statistics QMI](#).

## Coronavirus and birth statistics

Delays in birth registrations because of the coronavirus pandemic affected 2020 and 2021 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 registration services restarted where it was safe to do so. In 2020, 42% of registrations came in after 42 days (the usual legal limit) and in 2021, 26% came in after 42 days. Therefore, we decided to include all births registered up to 12 August 2021 in the 2020 dataset and all births up to 15 May 2022 in the 2021 dataset, to ensure that our birth statistics are as complete as possible and comparable with previous years. For more information, please see our [Births in England and Wales explained: 2020 article](#) 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.

Date of [most recent full assessment](#): September 2011.

Date of [most recent compliance check](#), which confirms National Statistics status: September 2011

Improvements since last review include that:

- 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](#) and [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, and five [explorable datasets](#) are now released alongside the first release of annual births data; this means more detailed births data (including small area geographies) are now available in a timelier manner

## 10 . Related links

### [Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales: 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 August 2022

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

### [Provisional births in England and Wales: 2021](#)

Article | Released 22 March 2022

Annual live births in England and Wales by sex, birthweight, gestational age, ethnicity and month, maternities by place of birth and with multiple births, and stillbirths by age of parents and calendar quarter.

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

Datasets (Nomis) | Updated as new data become available

Datasets on life events in England and Wales.

### [Baby names in England and Wales: 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 18 August 2021

Most popular first names for baby boys and girls in 2020 using birth registration data.

### [Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 13 January 2022

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 statistics on births.

### [User guide to birth statistics](#)

Methodology | Released 13 January 2022

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.