

Statistical bulletin

Live Births in England and Wales by Characteristics of Mother 1: 2011

The age and living arrangements of mothers based on birth registration data.



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Release date:
24 January 2013

Next release:
15 October 2013

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1. Main findings

- In 2011, nearly half (49%) of all live births were to mothers aged 30 and over
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of fathers were aged 30 and over in 2011 (excluding births registered solely by the mother)
- In 2011, 84% of babies were registered by parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting
- In 2011, the standardised average (mean) age of mothers for all births was 29.7 years
- For first births the standardised average (mean) age of mothers was 27.9 years

2. Summary

This bulletin presents statistics on live births in England and Wales in 2011 by characteristics of the mother. In particular, it provides birth statistics by age of mother, type of registration (within marriage/civil partnership, joint registration or sole registration), and average (mean) age of mother for all births and first births.

Many of the key summary figures included in this release have been published previously by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is however the first time that birth statistics for 2011 have been published by registration type (including a breakdown by age of mother and father), single year of age of mother and age of father. Birth statistics for 2011 providing the mean age of mother by birth order are also released for the first time.

Fertility rates and the average age of mother for England and Wales, 2002-2010 included in this publication have been calculated using revised mid-year population estimates which take account of the 2011 Census. Figures may therefore differ very slightly from those previously published.

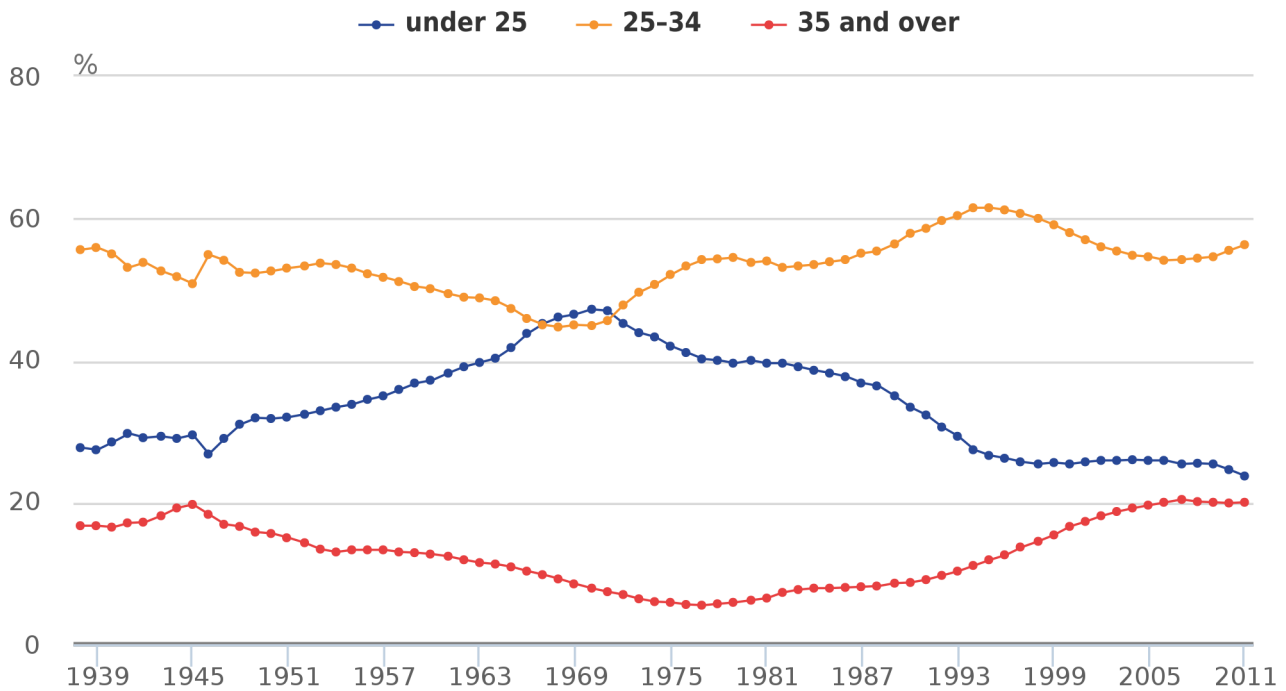
3. Timing of childbearing

Babies born in England and Wales in 2011 were most likely to have a mother aged 25–34, with over a half (56%) of mothers in this age group. A further 24% of babies were born to younger mothers, aged under 25, while a fifth (20%) had mothers aged 35 and over at the time of birth (figure 1). When compared with 2001 there has been very little change.

In 2011 the percentage of births to mothers aged 25–34 was more than double the percentage to mothers aged under 25, this was similar in 1938. In contrast, in 1971 births to mothers aged under 25 (47%) exceeded births to 25–34 year old mothers (46%).

Figure 1: Live births by age group of mother, 1938–2011

England and Wales

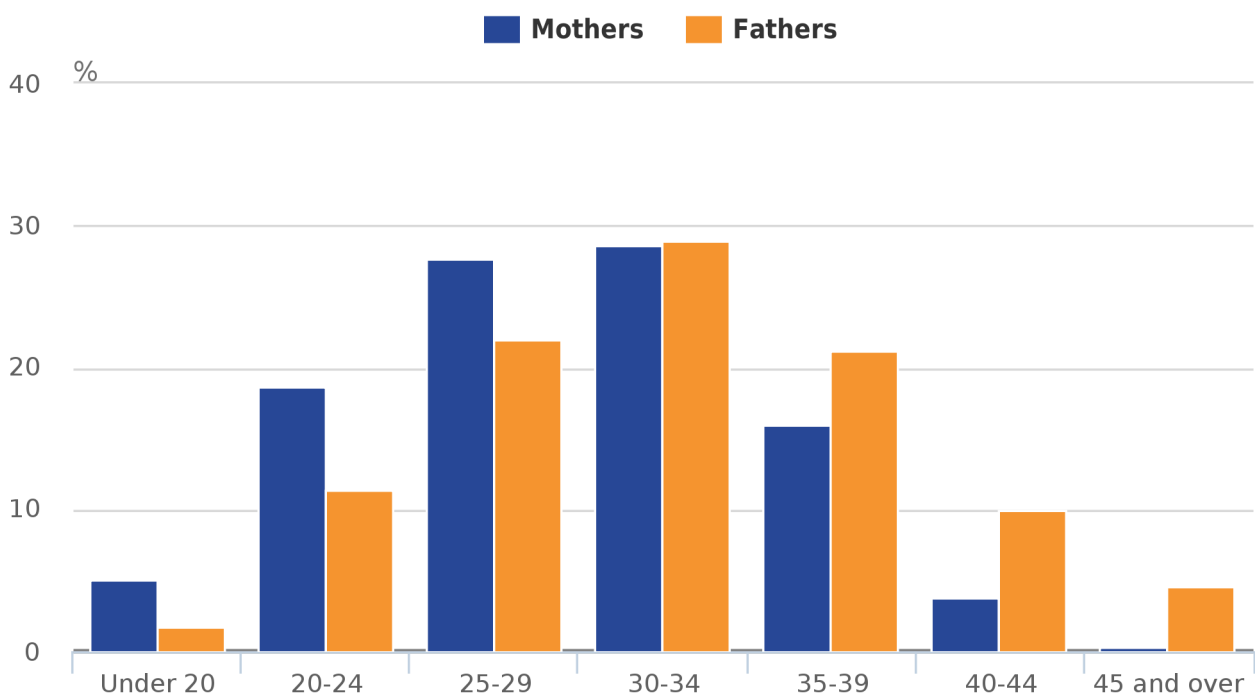


Source: Office for National Statistics

Fathers tend to be older than mothers (figure 2). Nearly half of all babies born in 2011 (49%) had mothers aged 30 and over, but nearly two-thirds (65% of babies) had fathers aged 30 and over (sole registered births, where the father’s information is not available, have been excluded). The percentage of fathers aged 30 and over has remained relatively unchanged over the last decade (65% of babies were fathered by men in this age group in 2001).

Figure 2: Live births by age group of mother and father, 2011

England and Wales



In 2011 the standardised average (mean) age of all mothers giving birth in England and Wales was 29.7 years, a small increase compared with 29.5 years in 2010.

Between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s, the average age of mother decreased by just under 3 years (29.3 years in 1944 to 26.4 years in 1973). Since 1973 the average age of mother has generally increased. The overall rise since 1973 reflects the increasing numbers of women who have been delaying childbearing to later ages. Possible influences include; increased participation in higher education, increased female participation in the labour force, the increasing importance of a career, the rising opportunity costs of childbearing, labour market uncertainty, housing factors and instability of partnerships ([Jefferies, 2008 \(297 Kb Pdf\)](#) ; [Ní Bhrolcháin, et al., 2012](#)).

These figures refer to all births; however, the standardised average age of women having a first birth (see background note 8) in 2011 was estimated to be 27.9 years of age, compared with 27.7 in 2010 and 26.6 in 2001. Changes in the average age of mother for first births since 1940 mirror changes in the average age of all mothers.

4. Partnership status of parents

Marriage or civil partnership (see background note 6) remains the most common family setting for births in England and Wales as a whole despite the steady fall in the percentage of births registered to married couples since the 1960s. In 2011 just over half of births occurred within marriage or civil partnership (53%) compared with 60% in 2001 and 94% in 1961.

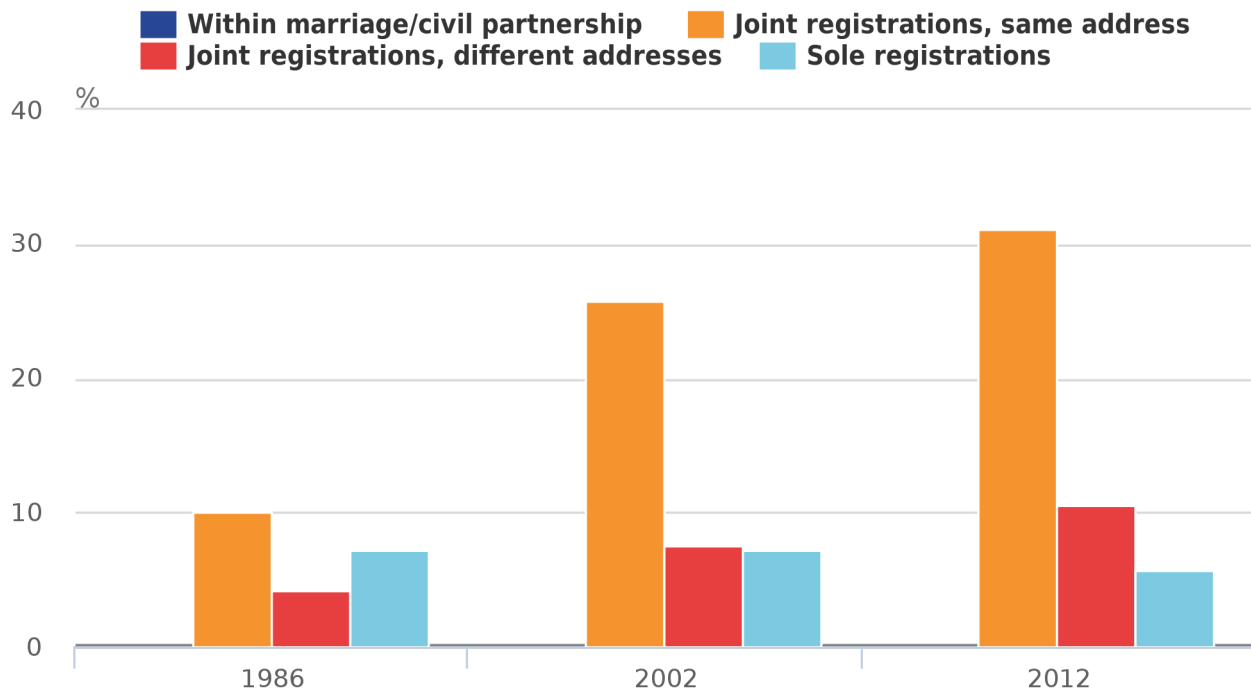
The percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership (47% in 2011) varies considerably by age. Almost all women (96%) aged under 20 who gave birth in 2011 were not married or in civil partnership. In contrast, at ages 30–34 and 35–39 the majority of women giving birth were either married or in a civil partnership, with only 31% of births outside marriage/civil partnership for each, the lowest percentage across all the age groups.

In 2011, the percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership was higher for all age groups compared with 2001.

Births outside marriage or civil partnership can be registered jointly by both the mother and father/second parent (see background note 6), or solely by the mother. Where the birth is jointly registered and the parents give the same address, it can be inferred that they are cohabiting. The proportion of births registered to cohabiting parents has increased in recent years (figure 3) but remained unchanged between 2010 and 2011 at 31% of all births, compared with 25% in 2001 and 10% in 1986 (the first year figures for cohabiting parents are available). This trend is consistent with increases in the number of couples cohabiting rather than entering into marriage or civil partnership (For further information, see [Statistics on families and households](#) on the ONS website). In contrast, the percentage of births registered solely by the mother has fallen very slightly over the last ten years to 6% in 2011 and 2010 from 7% in 2001. In comparison 7% of births in 1986 were registered by the mother alone.

Figure 3: Live births by type of registration, 1986, 2001 and 2011

England and Wales



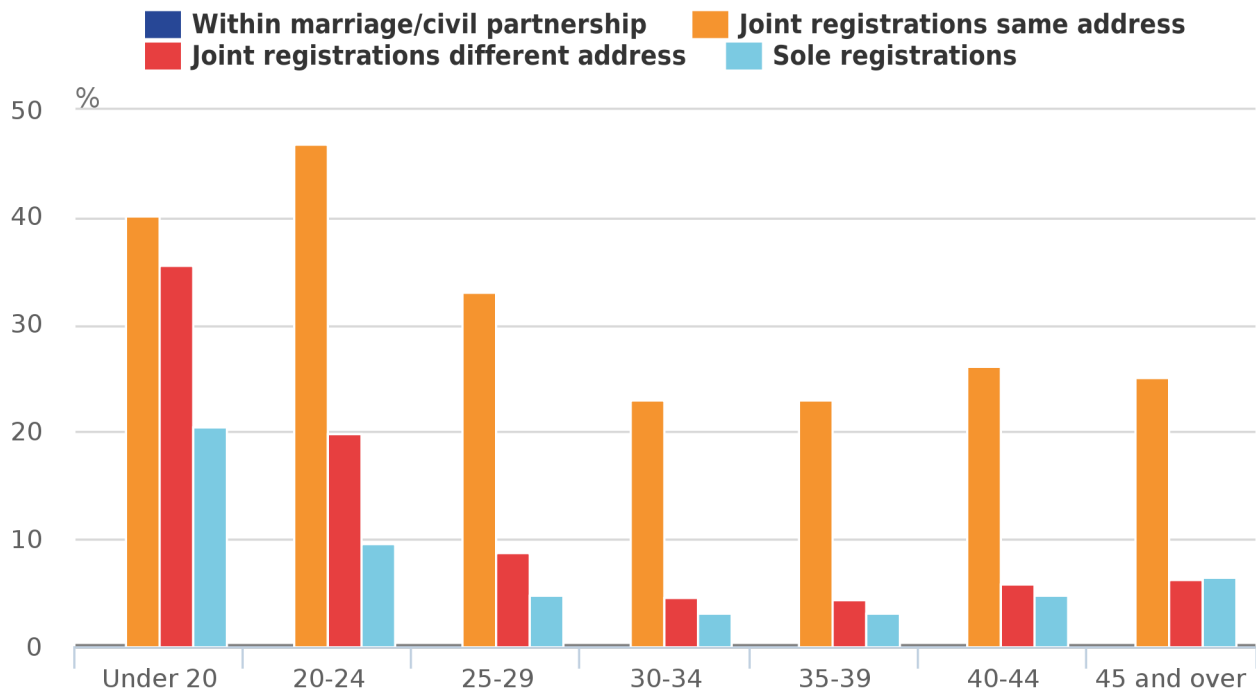
Source: Office for National Statistics

Overall, 84% of births in 2011 were to parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting (couples who are not married but are living together). Of the remainder, a further 10% of births were registered jointly by parents living at separate addresses, while only 6% were registered by the mother alone.

Births to mothers aged under 25 were most likely to be jointly registered by cohabiting parents, while for women aged 25–29 and older, marriage/civil partnership was the most common family setting for births, followed by cohabitation (figure 4). The percentage of births which were either jointly registered by parents living at different addresses or solely registered by the mother was higher among women aged under 25 than among older mothers.

Figure 4: Live births by type of registration and mother's age group, 2011

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

[O'Leary et al. \(2010\) \(2.5 Mb Pdf\)](#) provides a more detailed analysis of births by registration type in England and Wales, 1991 to 2008.

5. Planned changes to birth statistics

During May 2012 changes were made to the Population Statistics Act 1938, which means that information on the number of previous children and whether previously married is now collected from all mothers at birth registration and not just from married women. This will have an impact on a number of tables and [proposals for changes \(66.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) to outputs for 2012 and 2013 data are available on the ONS website. Feedback from users is welcome.

Changes to the tables included within [Live Births by socio-economic status of father](#) are also being considered including the possible implementation of the combined method for deriving the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (using the higher NS-SEC of both parents rather than the NS-SEC of the father). A proposal for changes to outputs for 2012 data will be available on the ONS website alongside the release of 2011 data.

6. Users and uses of birth statistics

The Office for National Statistics uses birth statistics to:

- produce population estimates and population projections, both national and subnational
- quality assure census estimates
- report on social and demographic trends

The Department of Health is a key user of birth statistics. Data are used, for example, to plan maternity services and inform policy decisions. Other key users of the data are local authorities and other government departments, who use the data for planning and resource allocation.

Other users include academics, demographers and health analysts who conduct research into trends and characteristics. Lobby groups use birth statistics to support their cause, for example, campaigns against midwife shortages. Special interest groups, such as Birth Choice UK, make the data available to enable comparisons between maternity units to help women choose where they might like to give birth. Organisations such as Eurostat and the UN use birth statistics for making international comparisons. The media also report on key trends in births.

7. Further information

More data on [live births in England and Wales by characteristics of mother \(516 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) (age of mother including mean age by birth order and type of registration) are available on the ONS website. This file also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these packages on the ONS website.

The 'Characteristics of mother 2' package will be published in March 2013 (the release date can be found on the [Publication Hub](#)). This package will contain:

- fertility rates by marital status
- live births within marriage by age of mother and number of previous live-born children
- first live births within marriage by marriage duration

Further publication dates of detailed 2011 birth statistics are available on the [Publication Hub](#).

A [quality and methodology information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) document 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. The tool will be updated in Summer 2013 to include revised rates for 2002-2010 which take account of the 2011 Census and rates for 2011.

For births 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

Jefferies J (2008) [Fertility Assumptions for the 2006-based national population projections \(423.9 Kb Pdf\)](#) , Population Trends 131 pp 19-27.

Ní Bhrolcháin M and Beaujouan E (2012), [Fertility postponement is largely due to rising educational enrolment](#), Population Studies: A Journal of Demography.

Office for National Statistics: [Statistics on families and households](#).

O'Leary L, Natamba E, Jefferies J and Wilson (2010) [Fertility and partnership status in the last two decades](#), Population Trends 140 pp 5-35.

9. Background notes

1. There were 723,913 live births in England and Wales in 2011, compared with 723,165 in 2010, a rise of 0.1%. The small rise in 2011 represents a continuation of the increasing numbers of live births recorded since 2001. During this period the number of live births has risen by 22% from 594,634 in 2001 despite a small fall between 2008 and 2009.
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 \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) document for births.
4. Percentages reported in this bulletin may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
5. Births outside marriage can be registered jointly by both the mother and father, or solely by the mother. No information on the father is available for sole registered births.
6. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 contained provisions enabling two females in a same-sex couple to register a birth from 1 September 2009 onwards. Due to the small numbers in England and Wales in 2009, 2010 and 2011, births registered to a same-sex couple in a civil partnership (22 in 2009, 335 in 2010, 417 in 2011) are combined with marital births while births registered to a same-sex couple outside a civil partnership (2 in 2009, 140 in 2010, 191 in 2011) are combined with births outside marriage. For births registered under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, the age of second parent has been included with age of father. Given the relatively small number of births registered to same-sex couples, this has a negligible impact on the statistics.
7. The standardised mean (average) age of mother is used in order to eliminate the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age and therefore enables trends over time to be analysed. Standardised means are calculated using rates per 1,000 female population by single year of age of mother. The 2011 average age of mothers has been calculated using the mid-2011 population estimates based on the 2011 Census. The average age of mothers for 2002–2010 has been calculated using population estimates for 2002–2010 revised to take account of the 2011 Census.
8. At birth registration in 2011, the number of previous births was only collected for births within marriage. This partial information on birth order from registration data has been supplemented with data from the General Lifestyle Survey (formerly known as the General Household Survey) to give estimates of true birth order for 2011. The average age at first birth is based on the estimated true birth order for all births whether inside or outside marriage. During May 2012, changes made to the Population Statistics Act 1938 were implemented, which means that information on the number of previous children and whether previously married is now collected from all mothers at birth registration and not just from married women. This will impact on a number of tables and [proposals for changes to outputs for 2012 and 2013 data \(66.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) are available on the ONS website. Feedback from users is welcome.
9. A list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the statistics and written commentary is available in [pre-release Characteristics of Birth 1 \(28 Kb Pdf\)](#). The rules and principles which govern pre-release access are featured within the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008](#).
10. 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
11. We welcome feedback from users on the content, format and relevance of this release. The Health and Life Events user engagement strategy is available to download from the ONS website. Please send feedback to the postal or e-mail address above.

12. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [ONS Facebook](#).
13. 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.