

Statistical bulletin

Live Births in England and Wales by Characteristics of Mother 1: 2013

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



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1. Main findings

- In 2013, over half (51%) of all live births were to mothers aged 30 and over
- Nearly two-thirds (66%) of fathers were aged 30 and over in 2013 (excluding births registered solely by the mother)
- The average age of all mothers increased to 30.0 years in 2013, compared with 29.8 years in 2012
- The average age of first time mothers was 28.3 years in 2013, compared with 28.1 years in 2012
- In 2013, 84% of babies were registered by parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting

2. Summary

This bulletin presents statistics on live births in England and Wales in 2013 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 2013 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. Also released for the first time are birth statistics for 2013 showing the average age of mother by birth order (first child, second child, etc).

3. Timing of childbearing

Babies born in England and Wales in 2013 were most likely to have a mother aged 25-34, with over a half (59%) of mothers in this age group. A further 21% of babies were born to mothers aged under 25, while 20% had mothers aged 35 and over at the time of birth.

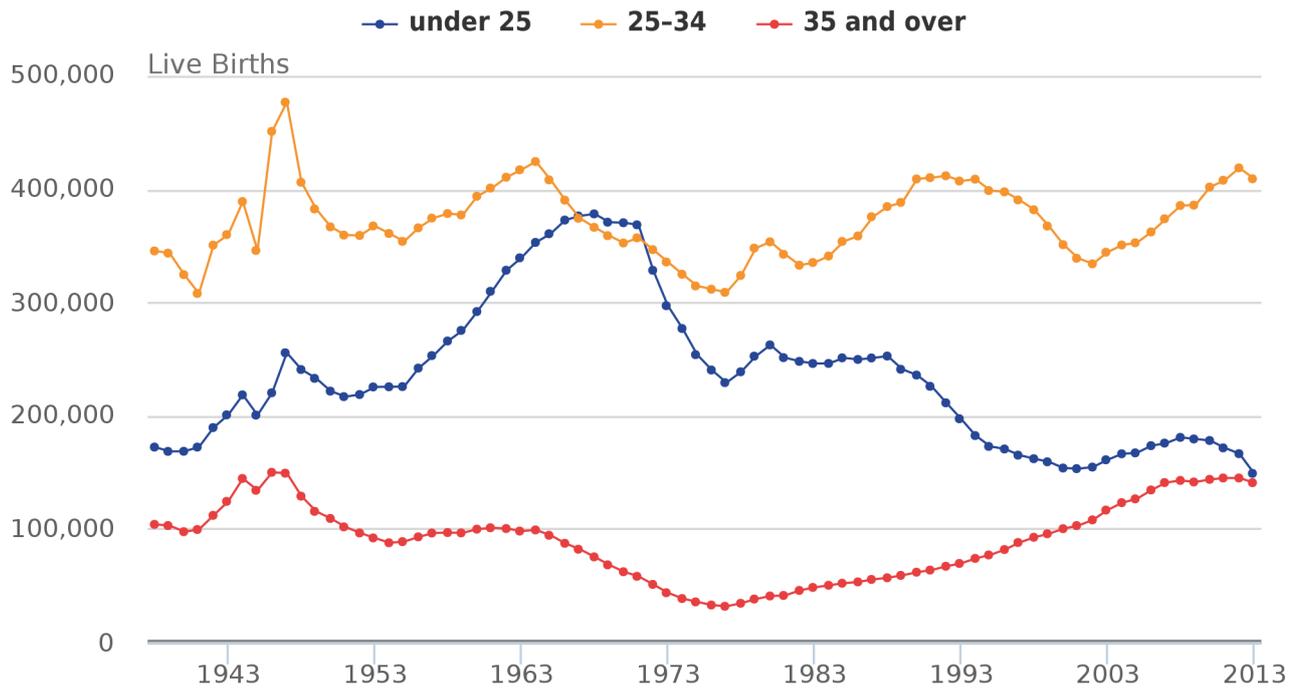
In 2013 the number of births to mothers aged 25-34 was more than double the number to mothers aged under 25; this trend has been recorded every year since 1993 (Figure 1). In contrast, between 1967 and 1971 births to mothers aged under 25 exceeded births to mothers aged 25-34.

The number of births in a given year is dependent on the number of women in the key childbearing ages (15-44 years) and on fertility rates in that year. Compared with 2012, the number of live births in 2013 decreased for women in all age groups.

For women aged under 25 and 35 and over, the fall in births resulted from falling fertility alongside an estimated decrease in the number of women in these age groups between mid-2012 and mid-2013. The decrease in births to women aged 25-34 in 2013 resulted from falling fertility at these ages since the estimated female population in these age groups increased.

Figure 1: Live Births by Age Group of Mother, 1938-2013

England and Wales

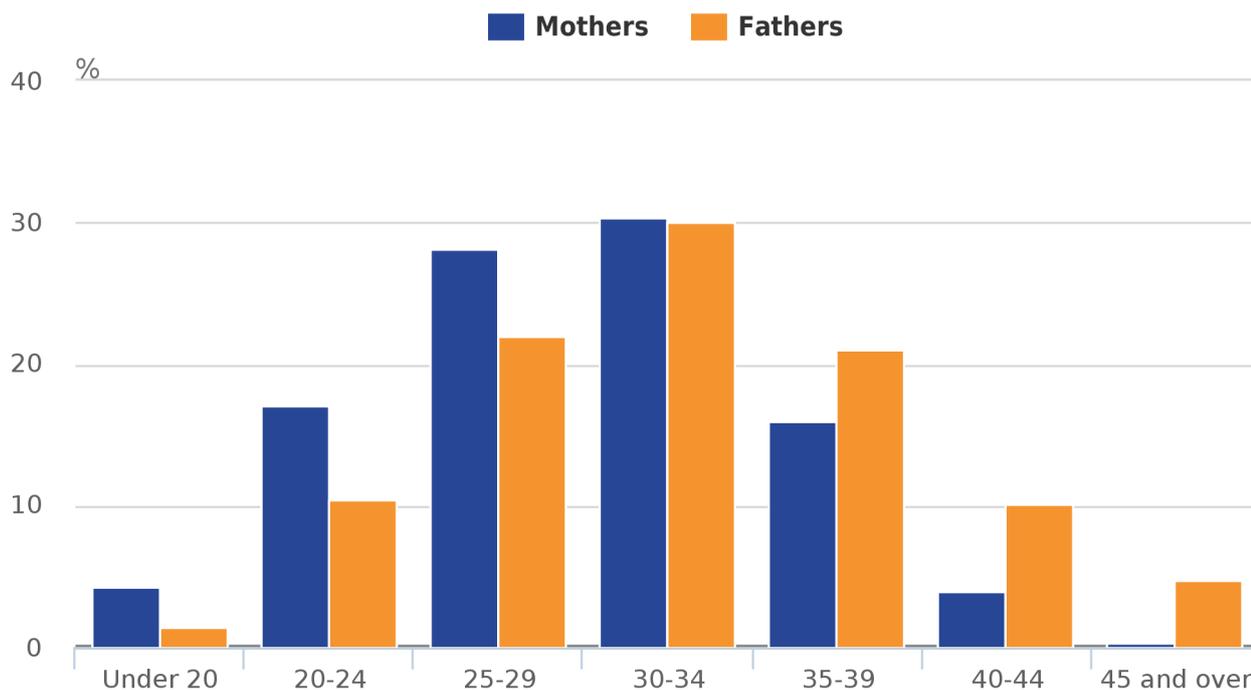


Source: Office for National Statistics

Fathers tend to be older than mothers (Figure 2). Nearly two-thirds (66%) of babies in 2013 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 (67% of babies were fathered by men in this age group in 2003).

Figure 2: Live Births by Age Group of Mother and Father, 2013

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

In 2013 the standardised average (mean) age of all mothers giving birth in England and Wales was 30.0 years, a small increase compared with 29.8 years in 2012 (see background note 6).

Between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s, the average age of mother decreased by just less than three 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 ([Ní Bhrolcháin et al. 2012](#)).

These figures refer to all births; however, the standardised average age of women having a first birth in 2013 was estimated to be 28.3 years of age, compared with 28.1 in 2012 and 27.0 in 2003 (see background note 7). 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 5) 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 2013 just over half of births occurred within marriage or civil partnership (53%) compared with 59% in 2003 and 93% in 1963.

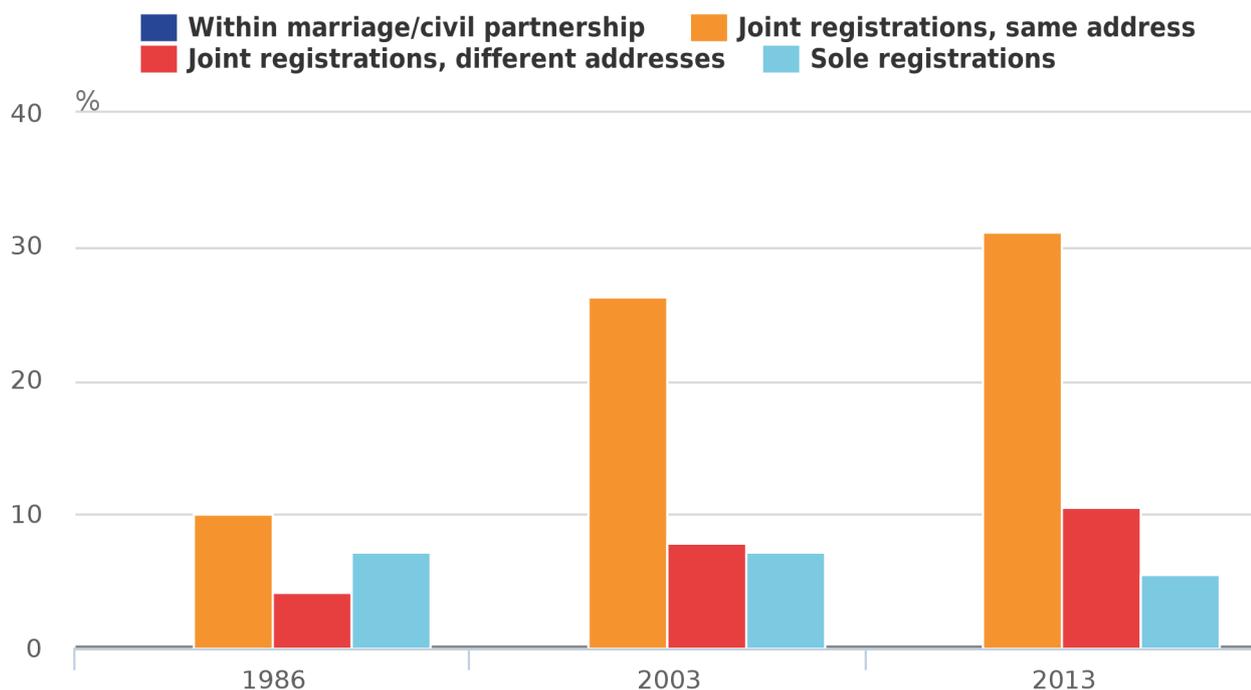
The percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership (47% in 2013) varies considerably by age. Almost all women (96%) aged under 20 who gave birth in 2013 were not married or in civil partnership. In contrast, at ages 30-34 and 35-39 the majority of women giving birth were either married or in a civil partnership, with only 32% of births outside marriage/civil partnership for each, the lowest percentage across all the age groups.

In 2013, the percentage of births occurring outside marriage or civil partnership was higher for all age groups compared with 2003.

Births outside marriage or civil partnership can be registered jointly by both the mother and father/second parent (see background note 5), 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 (couples who are not married but living together). The proportion of births registered to cohabiting parents has increased in recent years (Figure 3) but has remained unchanged since 2010 at 31% of all births, compared with 26% in 2003 and 10% in 1986 (the first year these figures were available). This trend is consistent with increases in the number of couples cohabiting rather than entering into marriage or civil partnership (see [Statistics on Families and Households](#)). In contrast, the percentage of births registered solely by the mother has fallen slightly over the last ten years from 7.2% in 2003 to 5.6% in 2013. In 1986 7.2% of births were registered by the mother alone.

Figure 3: Live Birth by Type of Registration, 1986, 2003 and 2013

England and Wales



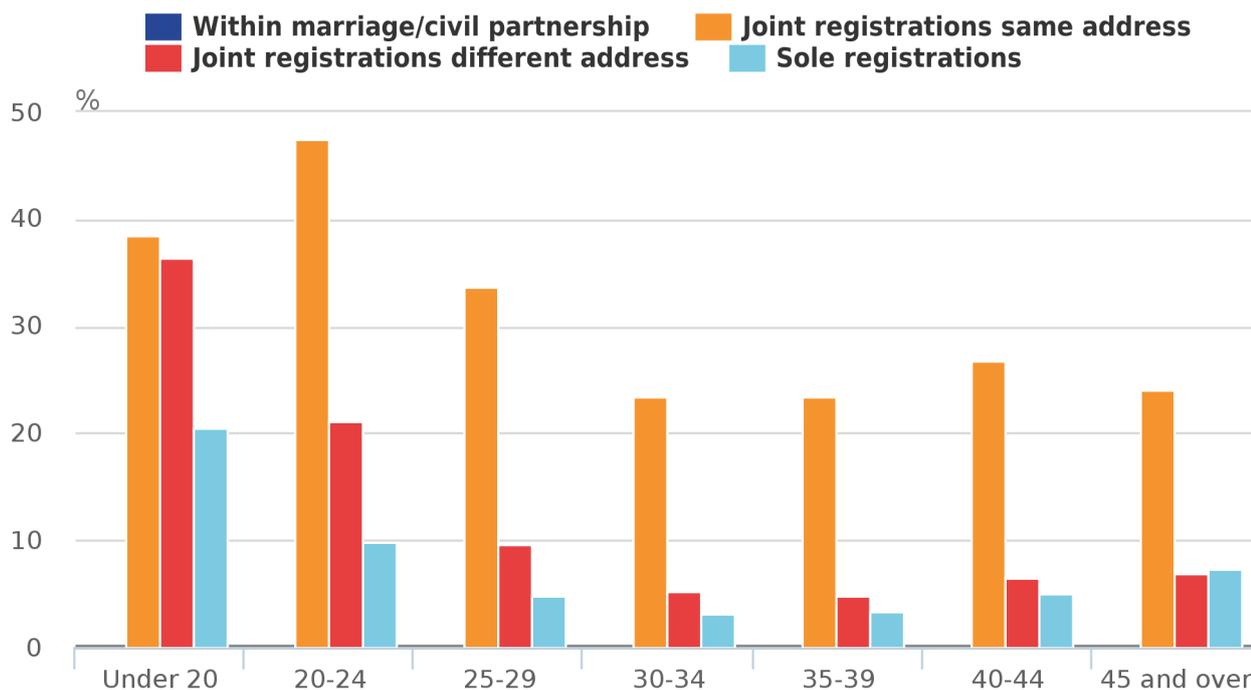
Source: Office for National Statistics

Overall, 84% of births in 2013 were to parents who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting. Of the remainder, a further 11% of births were registered jointly by parents living at separate addresses, while only 5.6% 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 and over, 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, 2013

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

[O'Leary et al \(2010\)](#) provides a more detailed analysis of births by registration type for the period 1991 to 2008.

5. Changes to birth statistics

During May 2012 changes were made to the Population Statistics Act 1938. This means that information on the number of previous children and whether previously married are now collected from all mothers at birth registration, not just from married women. This will have an impact on a number of tables and [proposals for changes](#) to outputs for 2012 and 2013 data were outlined on the ONS website in July 2012. Feedback from users was requested. No feedback was received so the proposed changes are being implemented.

These changes have affected [tables 4a, 4b and 5 \(480 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) in this release, which provide statistics by birth order. For birth registrations prior to May 2012, the partial information on birth order from registration data was supplemented with data from the General Lifestyle Survey to give estimates of true birth order. From May 2012 information on the number of previous children collected from all mothers at birth registration has been used. Data for 2013 represents the first full year of information available on the number of previous children collected at registration.

A paper describing the changes that have occurred to ONS birth statistics as a result of improvements to the Population Statistics Act is available on the [ONS website](#). It provides background to the changes and provides high level findings from the new data collected in 2012 and 2013.

An investigation of [Childbearing by registration status in England and Wales, using birth registration data for 2012 and 2013](#) examines the patterns and characteristics in birth registrations following the improvements to the data collected at birth registration. The principal characteristics explored in the paper relate to whether a woman has been previously married, and whether the birth is the mother's first child or subsequent child.

6. Users and uses of birth statistics

The Office for National Statistics uses birth statistics to:

- produce population estimates and population projections at both national and subnational levels
- 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, inform policy decisions and monitor child mortality. The [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#) sets out the desired outcomes for public health and how these are measured. This includes indicators related to births. Similar indicators are also included within the [NHS Outcomes Framework](#).

Other key users of the data are local authorities and other government departments for planning and resource allocation. For example, local authorities use birth statistics to decide how many school places will be needed in a given area. The Department for Work and Pensions uses detailed birth statistics to feed into statistical models they use for pensions and benefits.

Other users include academics, demographers and health researchers who conduct research into trends and characteristics. Lobby groups use birth statistics to support their cause, for example, campaigns against school closures and 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. Retailers use birth data to inform future demand. Organisations such as Eurostat and the United Nations use birth statistics for making international comparisons. The media also report on key trends and statistics.

7. Further information

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

The 'Characteristics of Mother 2' release will be published in December 2014/January 2015 (the release date can be found on the [GOV.UK](#) release calendar). This release will contain:

- median birth intervals
- live births by age of mother and number of previous live-born children

Further publication dates of detailed 2013 birth statistics are available on the [GOV.UK](#) release calendar.

[Quality and Methodology Information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) 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.

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

Ni 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, annual release](#)

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

9. Background notes

1. There were 698,512 live births in England and Wales in 2013, compared with 729,674 in 2012 (a fall of 4.3%). This fall represents a change to the increasing numbers of births that has been reported each year since a low in 2001, with the exception of a 0.3% fall in 2009. Between 2001 and 2012 live births rose by 23%. The fall in live births in 2013 represents the largest percentage annual decrease since 1975.
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. 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 of births registered to same sex couples, births registered within a civil partnership are included with births registered within marriage. Births registered by a same sex couple outside of a civil partnership have been included with births registered outside marriage. The impact on 2013 birth statistics is negligible since only 0.1% of live births were registered to same sex couples. In 2013 there were 655 live births registered to same sex couples in a civil partnership and 259 live births registered to same sex couples outside a civil partnership. 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.
6. The standardised average (mean) age of mother is used in order to eliminate the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age and this 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.
7. The average age at first birth is based on the birth order for all births whether inside or outside marriage. For birth registrations before May 2012, the number of previous births was only collected for births within marriage, this partial information on birth order from registration data was supplemented with data from the General Lifestyle Survey (formerly known as the General Household Survey) to give estimates of true birth order. During May 2012 changes to the Population Statistics Act were implemented. Information on the number of previous children is now collected from all mothers at birth registration and not just from married women. In 2012, these two datasets were combined to produce estimates of the average age of first birth. For 2013, all data on previous live births are taken from the birth registrations, rather than the General Lifestyle Survey.
8. 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

The [ONS charging policy](#) is available on the ONS website. In line with the [ONS approach to open data](#), ad hoc data requests will be published onto [the website](#).

9. We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback to the postal or email address above.
10. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
11. 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.