BABY BUST: UPDATE

The state of births in England and Wales

July 2026

CSJ The Centre for Social Justice

Contents

About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report Breakthrough Britain. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in Government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report It Happens Here shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners, and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK. The social challenges facing Britain remain serious.

In 2026 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Executive Summary

Britain's population is not replacing itself. For the fourth consecutive year, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has set a new record low, down 22 per cent in a decade, and marks an ongoing shift in the future of Britain's population.[1] Every 100 women alive today will produce only 66 daughters and 44 granddaughters, meaning that without migration each generation will be approximately a third smaller than the one before. The compound effect of this over decades is not a gentle shrinkage, but a structural transformation of the country.

An ageing nation will place a heavy burden on the next generation. It is the working-age population that funds pensions, staffs our public services, pays taxes and drives economic growth. The size of that cohort is declining relative to the retired population. The Old Age Dependency Ratio has already deteriorated from 4 workers to every 1 pensioner (4:1) in 1970 to 3.5:1 today. This is projected to reach 2:1 within a generation. The CSJ's previous analysis shows that to maintain even today's ratio the state pension age would need to rise to 75 by 2093.

This report follows the structure of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data release, bringing together a broad set of findings as they appear in the data to build a picture of declining fertility and other adjacent issues.

One such issue is migration. One quarter of babies born in England and Wales are now born to parents where neither were born in this country, up from 1 in 5 in 2016. Yet the falling fertility rate is not a problem that can be solved by immigration alone. Immigrant fertility rates, though higher than native British rates, are still mostly below replacement and converge toward native rates within a generation.[2]

Policies focussed on increasing the fertility rate must consider the marriage rates alongside, which in the US have been attributed to accounting for 75 per cent of the TFR decline.[3] The lack of a supportive partner was identified as the highest single contributor to women delaying motherhood.

A continuation of the existing fertility rate points us on a path towards childless towns. Cambridge, Brighton and Hove, and Islington all have fertility rates below 1. This is not to say that adults in these areas are shying away from responsibility at all, but that they are making different choices. Since 2011, the national dog population has grown by 2 9per cent, whilst births have fallen by 18 per cent in the same time period.[4]

The data suggests we are also heading for mass primary school closures. Using the Department for Education (DfE)'s central projection, we estimate that England is on course to lose the equivalent of around 1,500 primary schools by 2030 as pupil numbers decline.[5] This is the equivalent of 11 per cent of

1 Office for National Statistics (2026). *Births in England and Wales: 2025 (provisional).* Released 27 May 2026. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/datasets/birthsinenglandandwalesbirthregistrations

2 Estevez, E. et al. (2026). Fertility trends across migrant generations re-examined: insights from Finnish registrar data. *European Sociological Review.* Available at: https://academic.oup.com/esr/advance-article/doi/10.1093/esr/jcag009/8516430

3 Stone, L. 2025. *Yes, Marriage still matters for fertility: new evidence.* Institute for Family Studies. Available at: https://ifstudies.org/blog/yes-marriage-still-matters-for-fertility-new-evidence

4 PSDA (2023). *PAW PSDA Animal Wellbeing Report 2023.* Available at: pdsa.org.uk/what-we-do/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report/paw-report-2023/pet-populations

5 Department for Education (2025). *National pupil projections: July 2025.* Available at: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-pupil-projections-july-2025

primary schools needing to close within a decade.[6] This would put the jobs of up to 23,400 teaching staff and 31,200 non-teaching staff in primary and nursery schools at risk within the next decade.

The ONS data on stillbirths shows a well-established correlation between stillbirths and deprivation. Our analysis also shows that a woman in a stable relationship in the most deprived decile faces a lower stillbirth risk than a woman in a sole-registered birth at or near the national average of deprivation, suggesting that relational deprivation is a stronger indicator for stillbirths than material deprivation for stillbirths than material deprivation.

The headline findings

- The TFR has fallen from 1.79 in 2015 to 1.39 in 2025, a collapse of 22 per cent in a decade, and now 34 per cent below the replacement rate of 2.1.
- Since 2012's peak of 729,674 births, annual births have fallen by just over 144,000, a reduction of 20 per cent, despite the population growing substantially.
- The average age of a mother is now 31.1 years old, and the average age of a first-time mother has risen to 29.6. In 1975, the average mother was 26.4 years old.
- Fertility among women under 30 has collapsed over the last 20 years. The under-20 birth rate has fallen 75 per cent since 2005; the 20-24 rate is down 50 per cent; the 25-29 rate has fallen 27 per cent.
- Wales has a TFR of just 1.33, one of the lowest in the developed world. Cambridge (0.95), Brighton and Hove (0.97) and Islington (0.99) recorded fertility rates below 1.0 in 2024.
- More than a third of births (34.6 per cent) in 2025 were to mothers born outside the UK, up from 20.8 per cent in 2005.
- In 2025, 53.2 per cent of births were within marriage, compared to 91 per cent of births in 1973.
- Deaths are expected to exceed births in England and Wales from mid-2026, making natural population growth negative for the first time in the modern era.
- On the Department for Education (DfE)'s central projection, England will have approximately 1,150 more primary schools than it has children to fill them by 2030. This is the equivalent of 7 per cent of primary schools needing to close within a decade, which places more than 34,700 jobs at risk in the primary and nursery school sector.

6 TES (2025). *How many schools are there in the UK?* Available at: https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/how-many-schools-in-the-uk

Chapter 1:

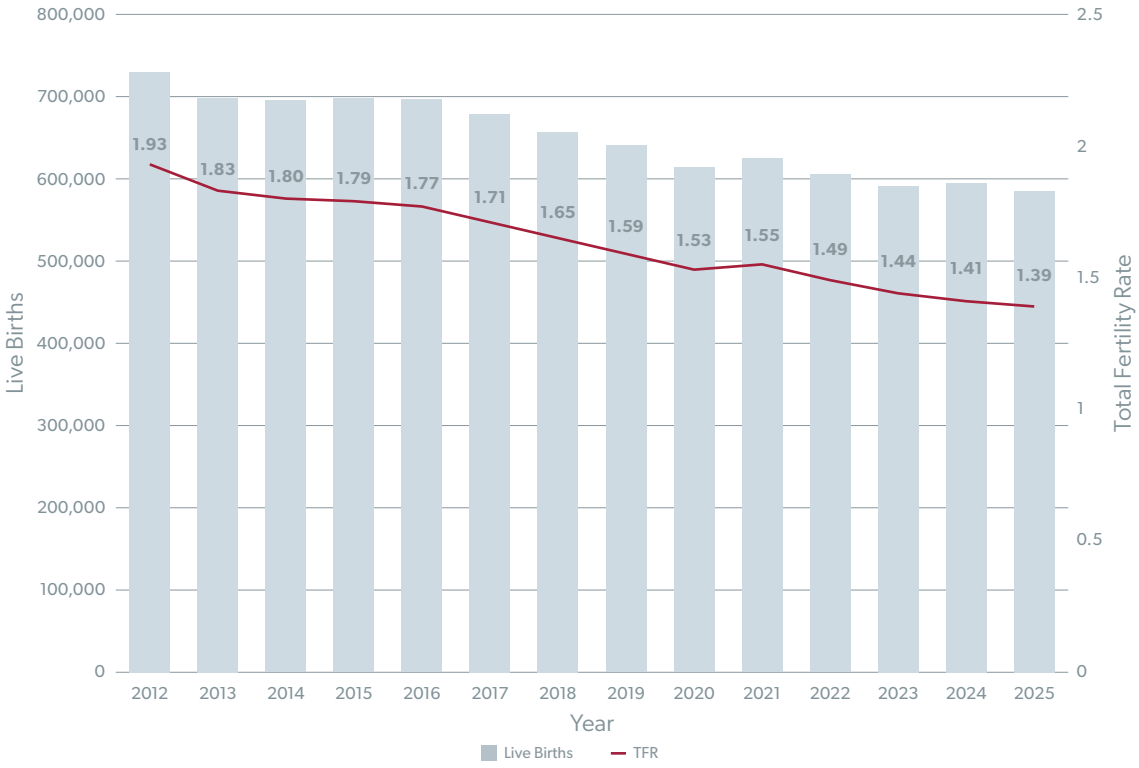
The scale of the collapse

1.1 A decade of falling births

There has been a large scale change in rates of family formation and births over the past decade and a half. In 2012, there were 729,674 live births in England and Wales, the highest figure of the modern era, assumed to be driven by the 1980s baby boomers reaching their reproductive years alongside a surge in births to foreign-born mothers.

That peak now looks like an anomaly. Every single year since 2012, with one brief post-Covid exception in 2021, has seen fewer births per woman than the year before. In 2025, there were 585,396 live births, which equates to 144,000 fewer than the 2012 peak.

Figure 1: Live Births and TFR by year



Source: ONS Births in England and Wales 2012-2025

This decline is particularly stark when considering that there are now more than 12 million women of childbearing age (which is defined by demographers as between the ages of 15-44[7]) in England and Wales, the highest figure in ONS records going back to 1938.[8] Women are finding themselves unable to, or are not choosing to, have children in the numbers that previous generations did. Between 2015 and 2025, the total birth count fell by 16 per cent. Over the same period, the combined population of England and Wales grew from roughly 57 million to over 60 million.

1.2 The Total Fertility Rate: what it tells us

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) measures the average number of children a woman would have over her lifetime if current age-specific fertility rates continue. For a population to replace itself without net migration, the TFR needs to be approximately 2.1. Another way to frame population stability is that there needs to be roughly as many births each year as there are people reaching their 50th birthday. In 2024, 740,377 people in England and Wales turned 50. There were just 594,677 births, meaning England and Wales need approximately 146,000 more births each year, an increase of around 25 per cent, to maintain population stability without relying on net migration.

The TFR in England and Wales fell to 1.39 in 2025. This is:

- The lowest ever recorded in the England and Wales data series (which began in 1938).
- 34 per cent below replacement rate.
- The fourth consecutive record low: the TFR has been falling every year since 2012, except for the brief 2021 bounce.

Wales has an even lower TFR of 1.33, a figure that would place it among the least fertile nations in the world if Wales were an independent country. Cardiff, the Welsh capital, records a TFR of just 1.19.

A falling Total Fertility Rate is often treated as an abstract demographic problem, but its human cost is concrete: fewer women will fulfil their hope of becoming a mother. In England and Wales, 16 per cent of women born in 1978, the most recent cohort to complete their childbearing years, had no children[9], despite surveys showing that around 90 per cent of young women want to become mothers.[10] The consequences compound across generations: to become a grandmother, a woman must not only have a child, but that child must too. With completed family size already at 1.95 for the 1978 cohort and projected to fall to 1.46 for girls born today, the ONS's data suggests that both motherhood and grandmotherhood is becoming an aspiration many will not achieve.

7 World Health Organisation. *Women of reproductive age (15-49).* Available at: https://platform.who.int/data/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-ageing/indicator-explorer-new/mca/women-of-reproductive-age-(15-49-years)-population-(thousands)

8 Office for National Statistics (2025). *Estimates of the population for England and Wales: mid-2024*, Table MYE2 Females. Released July 2025. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales

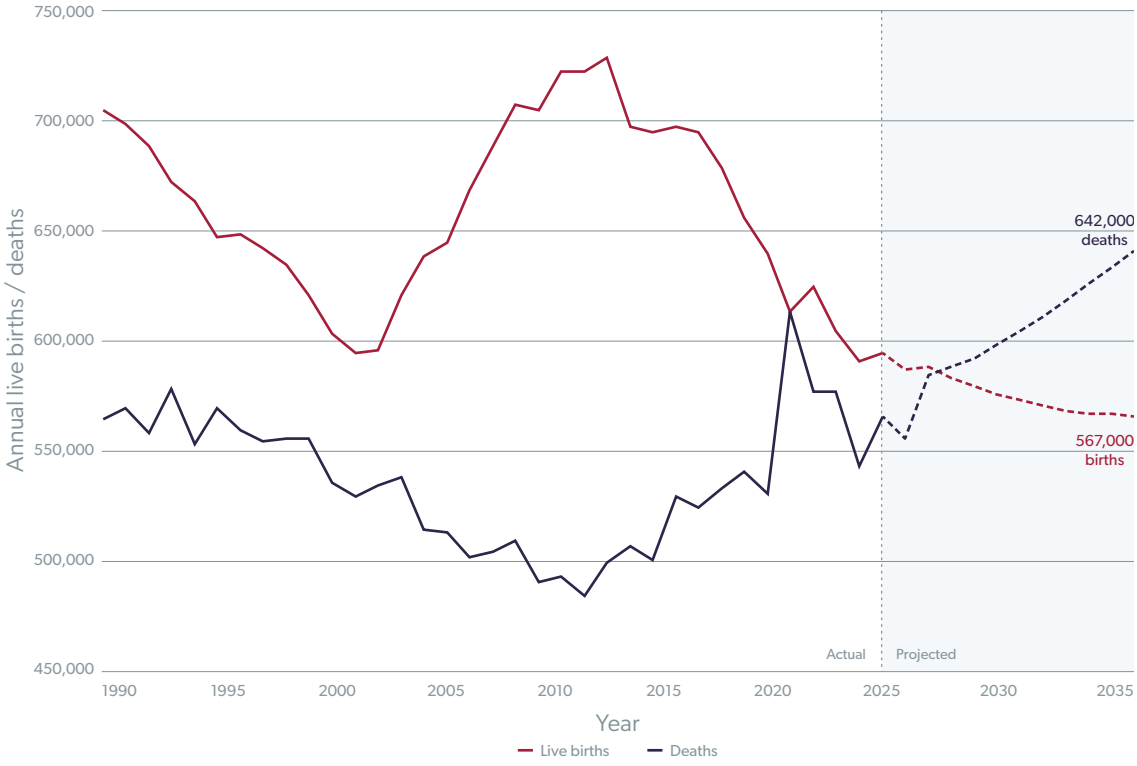
9 Office for National Statistics (2025). *Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales: 2023*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2023

10 New Social Covenant Unit (2023). *Closing the birthgap*. Available at: https://www.newsocialcovenant.co.uk/family/closing-the-birthgap/

1.3 Deaths will begin to exceed births for the first time in the coming months

For the whole of recorded British history, there have been more births than deaths each year, excluding anomalies and major crises. That is no longer true. The ONS predicts our population has undergone such significant structural change that deaths will consistently exceed deaths will exceed births in England and Wales from July 2026 onwards.[11]

Figure 2 – Live Births and Deaths, England and Wales, 1990-2035



Source: ONS Births in England and Wales 2025; ONS Deaths registered in England and Wales (annual series); ONS National Population Projections 2024-based (April 2026).

The practical implication is stark. From 2026/27, every person added to the UK population is the result of net immigration or a child of immigrants. Any reduction in net migration, whether by policy choice, economic shift, or the decline in global fertility that will eventually reduce the pool of potential migrants, translates directly into population shrinkage. Britain's demographic future has become entirely contingent on immigration policy in a way it has never previously been.

11 Office for National Statistics (2026). *National population projections: 2024-based*. April 2026. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2024based

Chapter 2:

A generation missing out

2.1 Mothers are older than ever

Mothers are getting older. The standardised mean age at childbirth in 2025 stands at 31.1 for mothers and 34.0 for fathers, both the highest ever recorded.

In 1975, the average mother was 26.4 years old. She is now 4.7 years older.

Table 2: Age of mother over time, England and Wales 2025

Age group	ASFR 2005	ASFR 2015	ASFR 2025	Change 2005-2025
Under 20	26.4	14.5	6.7	-75%
20-24	70.5	56.6	35.0	-50%
25-29	96.0	99.7	72.6	-24%
30-34	99.9	109.1	93.8	-6%
35-39	50.3	65.1	56.2	+12%
40+	10.8	15.0	14.8	+37%

Source: ONS Table 10, Births in England and Wales 2025. Age-specific fertility rate = live births per 1,000 women in age group.

This data shows that fertility has collapsed among younger women. The under-20 rate has fallen 75 per cent since 2005 and the 20–24 group has halved. Only women in their late thirties and forties are having children at higher rates than previous generations, but because fertility naturally declines with age, this cannot compensate for the losses at younger ages, let alone help women reach their desired family size.

-75%
Fall in under-20 birth rate
2005 to 2025

-50%
Fall in 20-24 birth rate
2005 to 2025

-24%
Fall in 25-29 birth rate
2005 to 2025

What makes this consequential is the interaction between delayed parenthood and biology. A woman in England and Wales who has not had a child by 30 has only a 50 per cent chance of ever becoming a mother. This is not a medical observation, but a demographic fact. Fertility declines from the mid-twenties, and IVF success rates fall sharply with age: from around 48 per cent per cycle at age 30–31 to just 6 per cent at 42–43.[12] The window for motherhood is narrowing precisely as more women approach it later.

12 VARTA (2021). How likely are you to have a baby after one, two or three IVF cycles? Available at: www.varta.org.au/resources/news-and-blogs/how-likely-are-you-have-baby-after-one-two-or-three-ivf-cycles; OSCEPA (2025). *Demographic change in the OSCE region*. Available at: www.oscepa.org/en/documents/special-representatives/demographic-change-and-security/reports-32/5170-report-of-special-representative-on-demographic-change-and-security-gudrun-kugler-21-february-2025-1/file

Chapter 3:

Where Britain is seeing the fewest babies

3.1 The sub-1.0 localities: fertility collapse in Britain's cities

In 2024, four areas in England recorded TFRs below 1.0, meaning women there are having children at less than half the replacement rate.

Table 3: Current Local Authorities with a TFR of below 1

Local Authority	TFR 2024	Births 2024	Geography
City of London	0.32	45	London Borough (statistical anomaly: no residential population)
Cambridge	0.95	1,177	University city, Non-metropolitan District
Brighton and Hove	0.97	2,094	Unitary Authority
Islington	0.99	2,282	Inner London Borough

Source: Births in England and Wales 2024

Cambridge and Brighton share the same profile: high-cost, culturally progressive cities with large student and young professional populations. Kensington and Chelsea sits just above 1 at 1.09, as do Westminster (1.00), Camden (1.05), and Southwark (1.05). All four are inner London boroughs where the economic cost of raising children and the cultural norms around career and lifestyle make parenthood increasingly uncommon.

The human scale of these numbers is perhaps best illustrated by comparison. Cambridge has an estimated 39,000 dogs, around 34 for every baby under the age of one.[13] In Brighton, the ratio is also high: approximately 15 dogs for every infant.

The phenomenon of childless cities will only continue to grow if birth rates continue to fall at their current pace.

13 Dog population estimates derived from Waggel/YouGov city dog ownership data (257 dogs per 1,000 people in Cambridge and 175 dogs per 1,000 people in Brighton); applied to ONS mid-year population estimates

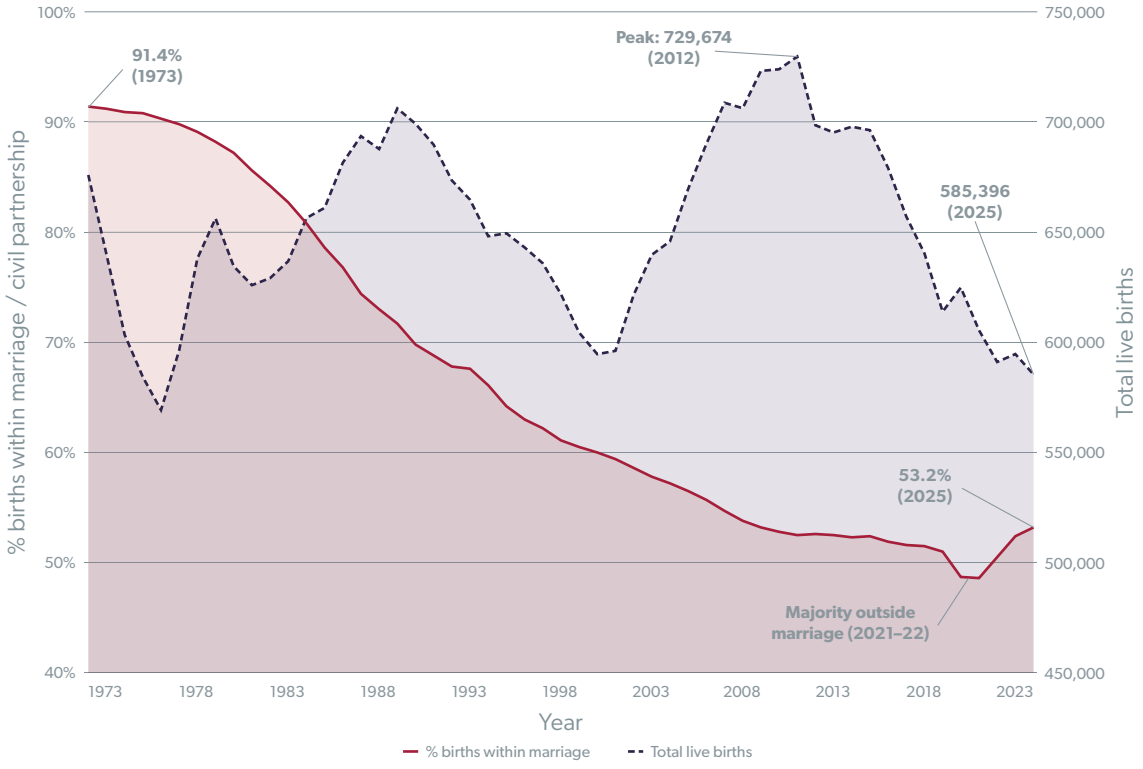
Chapter 4:

Family structure and the marriage connection

4.1 The decline of married parenthood

Alongside the headline fertility decline sits a transformation in the structure of families. The proportion of babies born within marriage or civil partnership has fallen drastically over the last half a century. The institution of married parenthood, the dominant social structure for families throughout British history, has shifted. In 2022, for the first time, more births were registered outside of marriage or civil partnerships (51.4 per cent) than inside (48.6 per cent). Since then, however, the number of births to married or civil partnered parents has ticked over the 50 per cent line again, now standing at 53.2 per cent, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Births within marriage and total live births, 1973-2025



Source: ONS Births summary tables 2022 ONS Births in England and Wales 2023–2025,. 'Within marriage' includes civil partnerships throughout.

4.2 Why marriage matters for women and for children

The relationship between marriage and fertility is one of the most robust findings in demography and is crucial to ensuring that babies are born to stable and committed families. Our initial Baby Bust report draws on the research of demographer Lyman Stone, who found that in the US, 75 per cent of the decline in TFR can be accounted for by the decline in marriage rates alone.[14] Stone's analysis also shows that across OECD countries, married women consistently have more children than unmarried women, a gap that persists even as non-marital births become more common.

This matters because marriage is not merely a social ritual. Marriage is a binding commitment that provides the necessary support women want before having children and ensures a sense of protection from further instability down the line. Women are far more likely to feel safe and able to have children if they are with the right partner, with many prepared to give up to seven of their reproductive years to have a supportive partner – two more than having financial stability (the second most important attribute for women).[15] Research also shows that cohabiting relationships are approximately three times more likely to dissolve than married ones, even controlling for socioeconomic background.[16] Children born to cohabiting couples face a 28 per cent chance of their parents separating before they turn five; for married couples, the figure is more than halved at 10 per cent.[17]

It is therefore unsurprising that as marriage rates have declined in recent history, so have fertility rates. A married woman is about 70 per cent more likely to have a child in any given year than one who is not. Combined with the evidence that married women who do have children go on to have more of them on average,[18] marriage remains one of the strongest structural predictors of whether a woman will reach her desired family size, let alone have children at all. If we care about increasing the fertility rate, ensuring that adults have the children and grandchildren that they desire, then we cannot separate the issue from marriage.

14 Centre for Social Justice (2026). *Baby bust*, pp.9–10. CSJ analysis of ONS 2022-based national population projections. Available at: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/CSJ-Baby_Bust.pdf

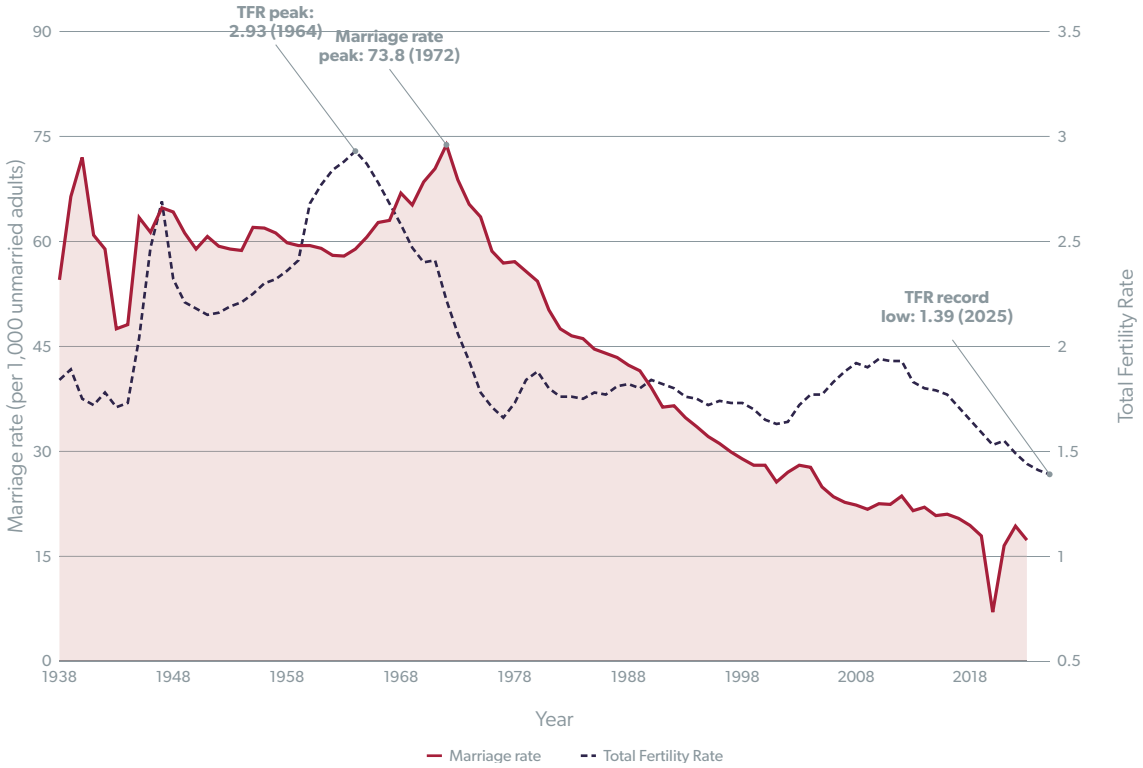
15 Sheppard, P. (2024). Using discrete modelling to understand the drivers of reproductive delay in the United Kingdom. Available at: doi.org/10.36922/ijps.3600

16 Centre for Social Justice (2026). *I do? The state of marriage in the United Kingdom*. February 2026. Available at: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CSJ-I_Do.pdf

17 Kiernan, K., Crossman, S. and Phimister, A. (2022). Families and inequalities. *IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities*. Available at: ifs.org.uk/inequality/families-and-inequalities

18 Sheffield, R. (2026). Declining Marriage, Not Teen Births, Explains America's Falling Fertility: What the Latest Data Show. Available at: https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2026-05/IB5409.pdf

Figure 4 – Marriage Rate and Total Fertility Rate, England and Wales, 1938-2025



Sources: ONS Marriages in England and Wales 2023; ONS Births summary tables 2022 ONS Births in England and Wales 2023-2025

4.3 Family size: the myth of shrinking families

There is a common misconception that Britain's falling birth rate is primarily driven by mothers having fewer children, with more completing the 'one-and-done' approach to family size. Stephen J. Shaw's research shows this is largely wrong.[19] The number of children per mother has remained remarkably stable, averaging around 2.30-2.39 among cohorts born in the 1960s and 1970s (the latest of whom have just finished their fertility window).[20]

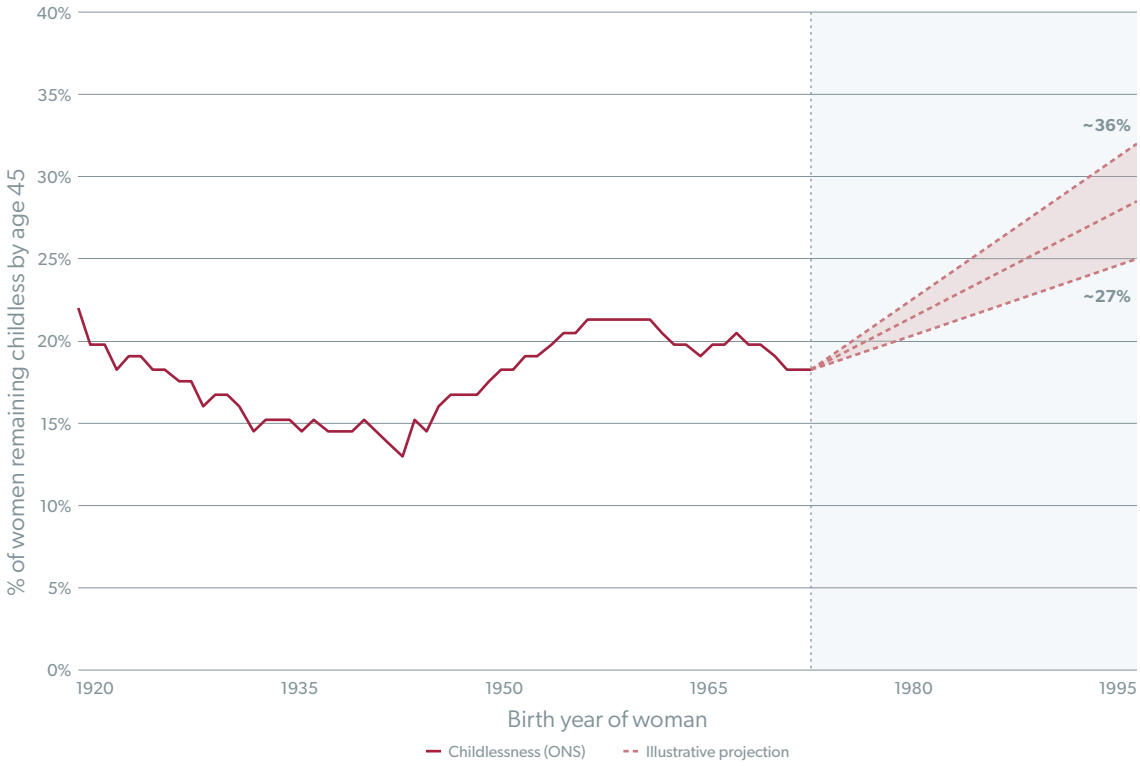
However, the age of mothers at the birth of their first child has significantly increased over generations, as discussed earlier in this report. The problem is not that existing mothers are stopping at one child, but that a growing share of women are not becoming mothers at all due to their delay into motherhood.[21]

19 Shaw, S.J. (2025). On a micro demographic framework for decomposing contemporary fertility dynamics. *Scientific Reports*, 15, Article 30726. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-11522-9

20 Office for National Statistics (2026). *Fertility for those born in different years, England and Wales: 2024*. Released 10 June 2026. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2024/relateddata

21 McCurdy, C. (2026). *Bye bye baby: assessing Britain's falling birth rate since the early 2010s*. Available at: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2026/03/Bye-bye-baby.pdf

Figure 5 – Permanently childless women by birth cohort, England and Wales



Source: ONS, Childbearing for Women Born in Different Years, England and Wales 2024 with CSJ analysis

As this graph shows, the proportion of women who have never had children by age 45 fell to a historic low of 9 per cent for women born in 1946, before rising sharply in subsequent decades. The latest ONS data shows that childlessness peaked at around 20 per cent for women born in the mid-1960s, more than double the 1946 low, before easing slightly to 16 per cent for women born in 1979, the most recent cohort with complete observed data. Whether this modest reversal represents a sustained trend or a temporary plateau remains to be seen. If the longer-term trajectory continues, illustrative projections suggest women born between 1990 and 1995 could face a permanent childlessness rate of 27–36 per cent. This would correspond to approximately 600,000 women not becoming mothers, regardless of their desire.

Chapter 5:

Impact on schools

~1,136	£1.5bn	34,700
surplus primary schools by 2030	Annual school funding lost by 2030	Primary school jobs at risk by 2030

5.1 The school closure crisis: how declining births become empty classrooms

With fewer babies being born each year, the flow of children into the school system is rapidly declining. England's primary school sector is already operating with significant spare capacity, with more than 600,000 excess places at the time of writing.[22] Given that school funding follows the pupil, a smaller intake means less funding overall. In areas where birth rates are especially low, this will place growing pressure on school leaders to make difficult cuts and, in some cases, close schools altogether.

There are 16,712 state-funded primary schools and 376 state-funded nurseries in England, each serving an average of 264 pupils per school or nursery, each serving an average of around 200 pupils.[23] By then, the Department for Education projects that the nursery and primary school population will be 300,000 pupils smaller than it was in 2025, the equivalent of around 1,136 schools and nurseries' worth of places.[24]

Each primary pupil attracts £4,955 in funding, so a decline of this scale could strip close to £1.5 billion from school budgets across England.[25] The consequences would extend beyond school finances to the workforce itself. If 1,150 primary schools were to close by 2035, that would amount to roughly 7 per cent of the current total. Applying the same proportion to the nursery and primary teaching workforce suggests that up to 14,900 teachers could be at risk, alongside a further 19,800 support staff roles.[26]

22 Department for Education (2026). *School capacity.* Released 19 March 2026. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-capacity/2024-25#section-current-school-capacity

23 Department for Education (2026). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics.* Released 4 June 2026. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2025-26#section-schools-and-pupils

24 Department for Education (2025). *National pupil projections.* Released 17 July 2025. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/national-pupil-projections/2025#section-national-pupil-projection-results-and-comparison-to-previous-model-results

25 Department for Education (2025). *Schools block funding formulae 2025 to 2026: Analysis of local authorities' schools block funding formulae.* Released 26 June 2025. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-block-funding-formulae-2025-to-2026/schools-block-funding-formulae-2025-to-2026-analysis-of-local-authorities-schools-block-funding-formulae

26 Department for Education (2026). *School workforce in England.* Released 4 June 2026. Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2025

Chapter 6:

Britain's babies and their parents' origins

34.6%	40.2%	27.3%
Births to non-UK-born mothers in 2025	**Births with at least one non-UK-born parent**	**Births to two non-UK-born parents in 2025**
Up from 28.2% in 2016	*2025 (up from 35.8% in 2022)*	*Up from 20.9% in 2016*

6.1 The scale of the shift

In 2025, 34.6 per cent of all live births in England and Wales were to mothers born outside the United Kingdom. A further 5.6 per cent were to UK-born mothers whose partner was born abroad. Taken together, in 2025 at least 40.2 per cent of all children born in England and Wales had at least one parent who was not born in this country.

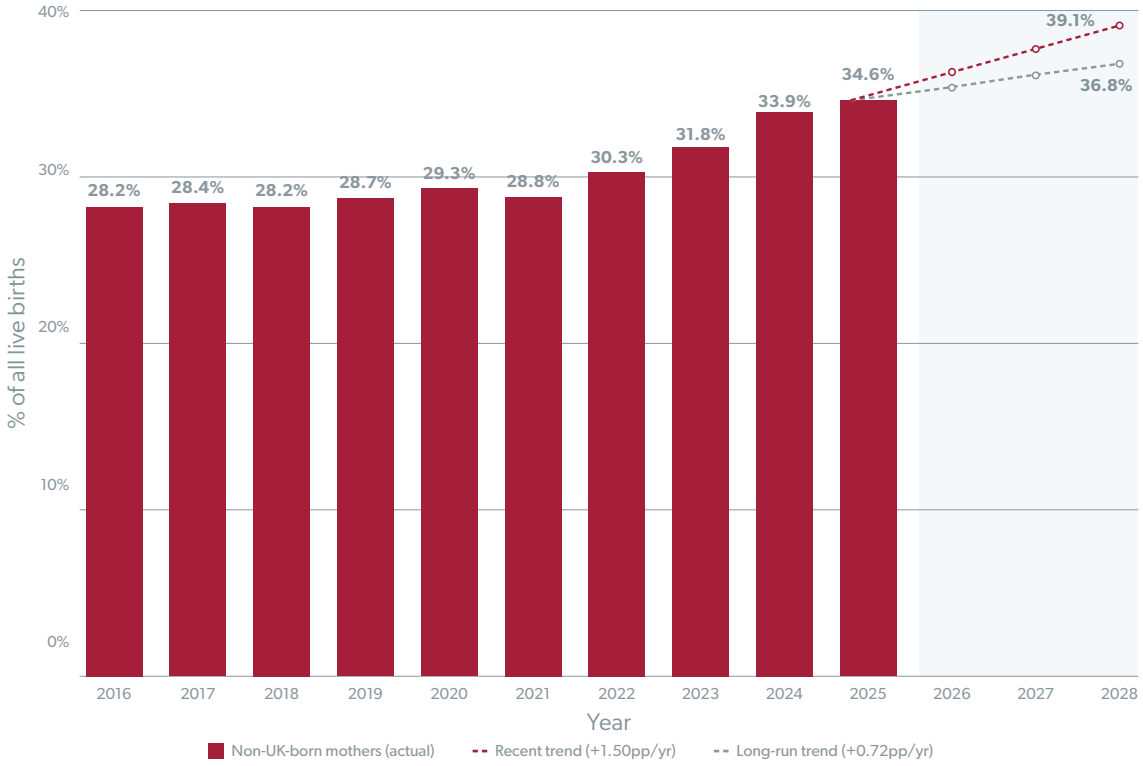
This is not a problem in itself. Britain has always been shaped by successive waves of immigration, and many of its most productive citizens, most successful businesses, and most vital public services have been built by people born elsewhere. But the scale and pace of the shift now taking place, and its interaction with the collapse in fertility among UK-born women, requires analysis.

6.2 Births to non-UK-born mothers: a decade of change

The proportion of births to non-UK-born mothers has been rising largely without interruption for two decades. In 2005, it stood at 20.8 per cent. As shown in Figure 6, by 2016 it had reached 28.2 per cent. Yet now it stands at 34.6 per cent, its highest level in records going back to at least 1975.

The trajectory since 2022 is particularly striking. The proportion rose 1.5 percentage points in 2022 alone and has continued rising: from 30.3 per cent in 2022, to 31.8 per cent in 2023, to 33.9 per cent in 2024, to 34.6 per cent in 2025. The annual rate of increase has roughly doubled compared with the 2016 to 2021 average.

Figure 6: Births to non-UK-born mothers, England & Wales, 2016–2025 with projections to 2028

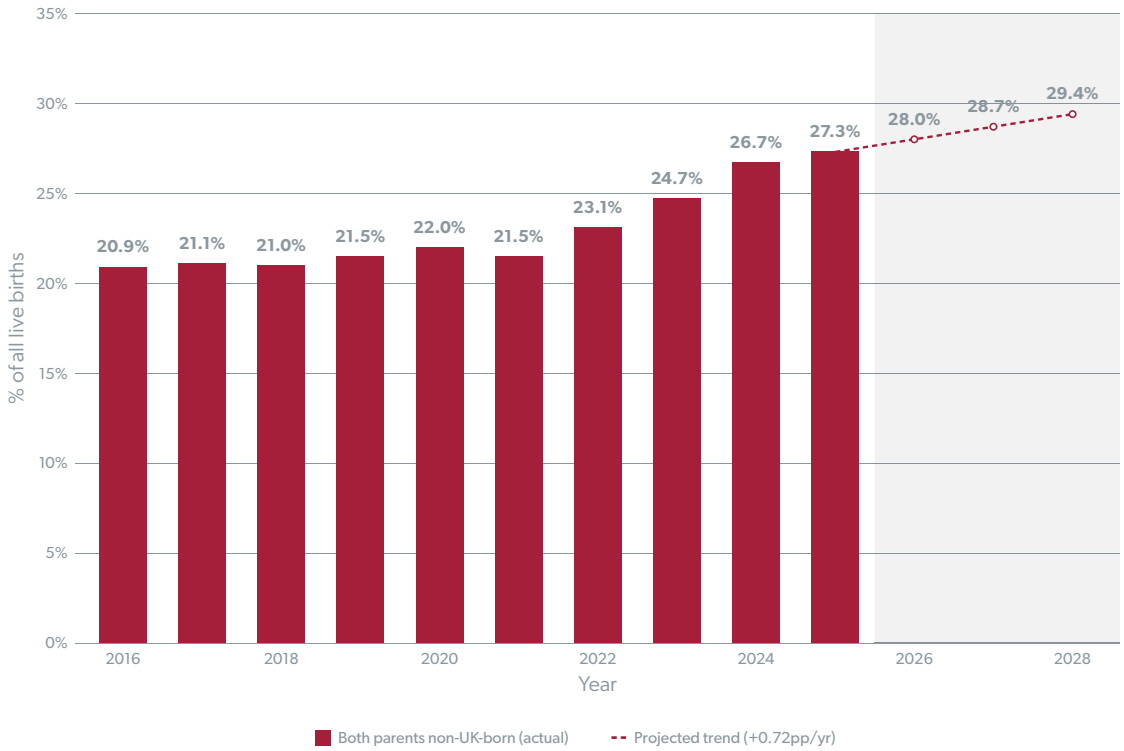


Sources: Change to: ONS Births summary tables 2016–2025 with CSJ analysis.

6.3 Both parents non-UK: the fastest-moving trend

The most striking single statistic in this chapter is the proportion of births where both parents were born outside the United Kingdom. In 2025, this stood at 27.3 per cent — meaning more than 1 in 4 babies born in England and Wales have two parents, neither of whom were born in the UK themselves. In 2016, the equivalent figure was 20.9 per cent, or roughly 1 in 5.

Figure 7: Births where both parents were born outside the UK, England & Wales, 2016–2025



Source: Change to Source: ONS Parents' country of birth 2025 with CSJ analysis

As shown in Figure 7, the trend held broadly flat between 2016 and 2021, fluctuating within a narrow 20.9–22.0 per cent band. Since 2022, the pace has accelerated sharply. The figure rose from 23.1 per cent in 2022 to 24.7 per cent in 2023, then jumped to 26.7 per cent in 2024 and 27.3 per cent in 2025. This acceleration coincides with the large increase in net migration to the UK from 2021 onwards, bringing in significant numbers of couples and young adults who are now forming families.

6.4 What this means for the UK fertility rate

The rise in births to non-UK-born parents must be understood in the context of the collapse in fertility among UK-born women.

The headline TFR of 1.39 for 2025 is an average across both groups. Since non-UK-born women constitute 34.6 per cent of all mothers but have a meaningfully higher TFR, the TFR for UK-born women in 2025 is almost certainly materially below 1.39. The non-UK-born population is, in effect, providing a partial demographic buffer against an even sharper decline in our fertility rate.

It is equally important to note that this buffer is temporary. Research consistently shows that immigrant fertility rates converge towards native rates within a generation, as migrants settle, experience British housing costs, career patterns and cultural norms, and make the same choices as their neighbours.[27] The higher fertility of the non-UK-born population is a feature of the first generation. Their children's TFR will likely look much more like the UK average.

27 Estevez, E. et al. (2026). Fertility trends across migrant generations re-examined: insights from Finnish registrar data. *European Sociological Review*. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/esr/advance-article/doi/10.1093/esr/jcag009/8516430

Chapter 7:

Stillbirths, deprivation and the relationship gap

2,292 **Stillbirths in England & Wales, 2025** *3.9 per 1,000 births*	**70%** **Higher stillbirth rate in most deprived areas** *5.1 vs 3.0 per 1,000 (England, 2025)*	**76%** **Higher rate for sole-registered births** *6.59 vs 3.74 per 1,000 (2025)*

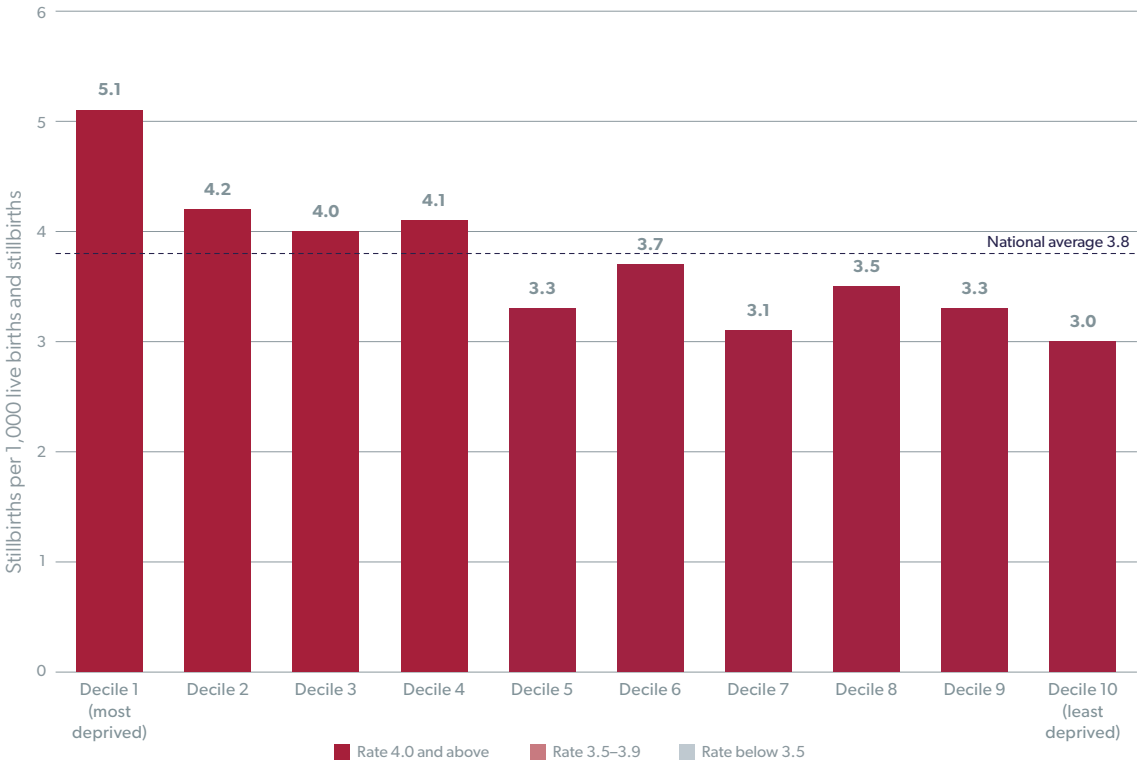
7.1 The stillbirth toll in 2025

In 2025, 2,292 babies were stillborn in England and Wales. Every one of these deaths is a personal catastrophe; a family that did not get to bring their baby home, a loss that research consistently finds has devastating and lasting effects on parental mental health, relationships, and future pregnancies.

While the UK has made progress in reducing stillbirths over the past decade, the rate in the most deprived communities has remained stubbornly high. This chapter examines what the 2025 data shows about the relationship between deprivation, family structure, and stillbirth risk, pointing to the fact that the absence of a stable, committed relationship around pregnancy is the single greatest indicator of stillbirths.

7.2 The poverty gradient: deprivation decile by decile

Figure 8: Stillbirth rate by deprivation decile, England, 2025



Source: Births in England and Wales 2025.

The stillbirth rate in the most deprived decile of England (5.1 per 1,000) is 70 per cent higher than in the least deprived tenth (3.0 per 1,000). In absolute terms, Decile 1 recorded 394 stillbirths against 116 in Decile 10. If mothers in the most deprived areas experienced the same stillbirth rate as those in the least deprived areas, approximately 162 of those 394 stillbirths would not have occurred.

This inequality is not new, and it is not narrowing. Eight years of policy effort, NHS investment, and stillbirth reduction programmes have not moved the inequality.[28]

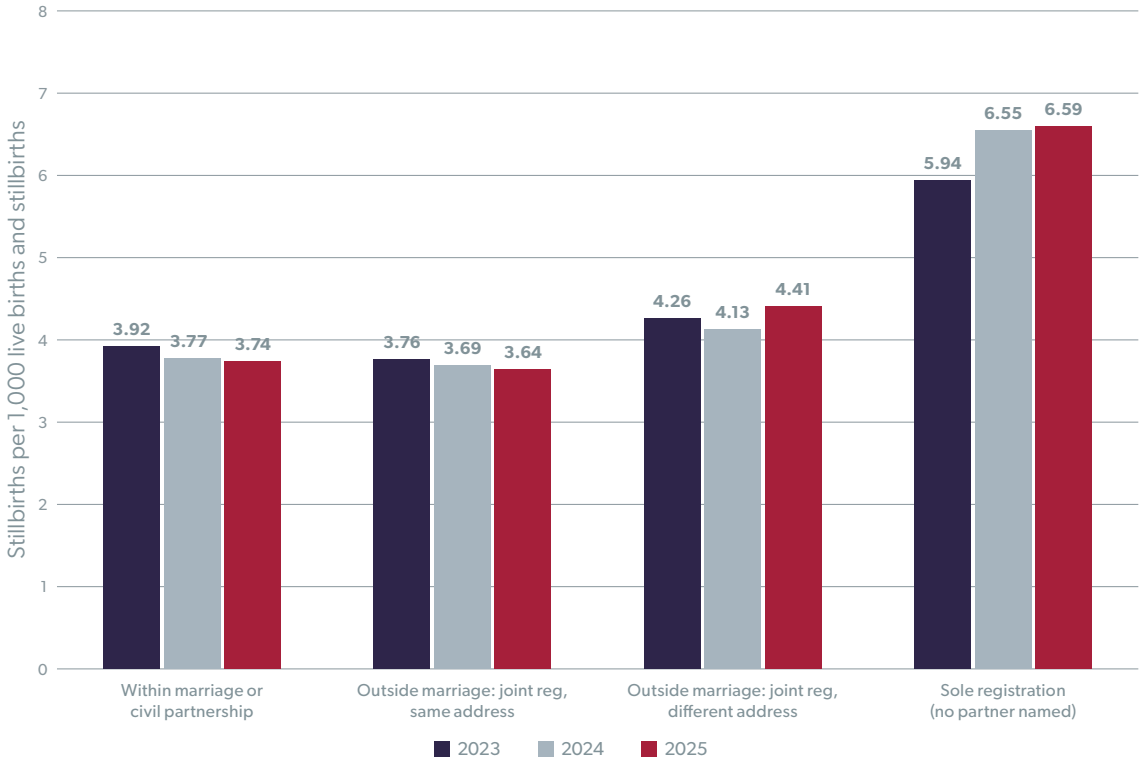
28 Kingdon, C. et al. (2019). Inequalities and stillbirth in the UK: a meta-narrative review. *BMJ Open*. Available at: https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/9/9/e029672.full.pdf

7.3 The registration type data: a relationship signal in the ONS numbers

The ONS births data does not directly record whether a mother has a stable partner, but it does record how a birth is registered, providing a meaningful proxy for the presence of a father figure shortly after birth.

As a statistical point it should be noted that sole-registered births represent a very small proportion of all maternities (4.3 per cent in 2025) and therefore a very small absolute number of sole-registered stillbirths at 167. Although the numbers may be small, the grief is not.

Figure 9: Stillbirth rate by registration type, England, Wales and Elsewhere, 2023–2025



Source: ONS, Births in England and Wales 2023, 2024 and 2025. . Rate = stillbirths per 1,000 live births and stillbirths.

Figure 9 showcases the importance of relational deprivation, and not just material. The stillbirth rate for births within marriage or civil partnership (3.74 per 1,000 in 2025) is near identical to the rate for outside-marriage births registered jointly at the same address (3.64 per 1,000). The presence of a committed, co-resident partner, whether married or cohabiting, is associated with the same, lower level of stillbirth risk.

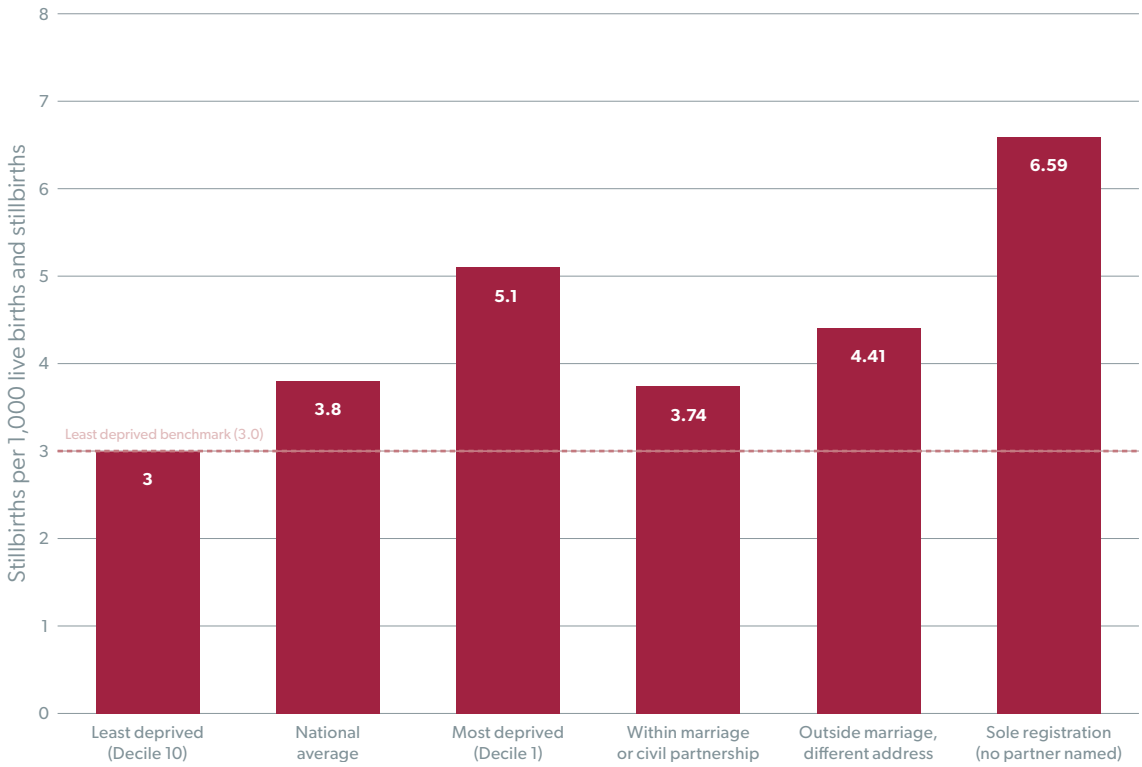
The rate then rises when parents live at different addresses (4.41 per 1,000). However, the rate for sole-registered births where no father is named is 6.59 per 1,000 in 2025: 76 per cent higher than the rate for births within marriage and 81 per cent higher than for jointly registered cohabiting births. This is a consistent pattern across 2023, 2024 and 2025. The evidence strongly suggests that the absence of a stable, committed partner is a meaningful risk factor for stillbirth.

7.4 The compounding effect: poverty and isolation together

The deprivation gradient and the registration-type gradient are not independent phenomena. Women who are both in the most deprived areas and without a stable co-resident partner face compound risk: the biological effects of chronic poverty-related stress on the pregnancy, the social and psychological effects of navigating that stress alone, the reduced likelihood of attending antenatal appointments, and the reduced probability of a professional noticing that something is wrong.

Sole registrations are disproportionately concentrated in the most deprived areas: the ONS birth characteristics data consistently shows that sole registration rates are highest in Decile 1 areas, where they can account for 8 to 10 per cent of all births, compared with under 2 per cent in Decile 10. A woman in Decile 1 registering alone is therefore experiencing the highest-risk scenario from both dimensions simultaneously.

Figure 10: The stillbirth gradient from affluence to sole registration, England, 2025



Sources: ONS Table 9 Births in England and Wales 2025 Rate = stillbirths per 1,000 live births and stillbirths.

Figure 10 illustrates the cumulative progression. Moving from the least deprived areas (3.0 per 1,000) to the most deprived (5.1 per 1,000) already represents a 70 per cent increase in risk. Moving further to births registered at a different address (4.41 per 1,000) adds another dimension of instability. For sole-registered births (6.59 per 1,000), the rate is more than double that of the least deprived baseline – a 119 per cent difference.

What is striking about Figure 10 is that poverty is not the only predictor of stillbirths, which has already been well-established. A woman in a stable cohabiting relationship in the most deprived decile faces a lower stillbirth risk than a woman with a sole-registered birth at or near the national average of deprivation, suggesting that relational deprivation is an even stronger indicator for stillbirths than material deprivation.

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