

# Births

In 2015:

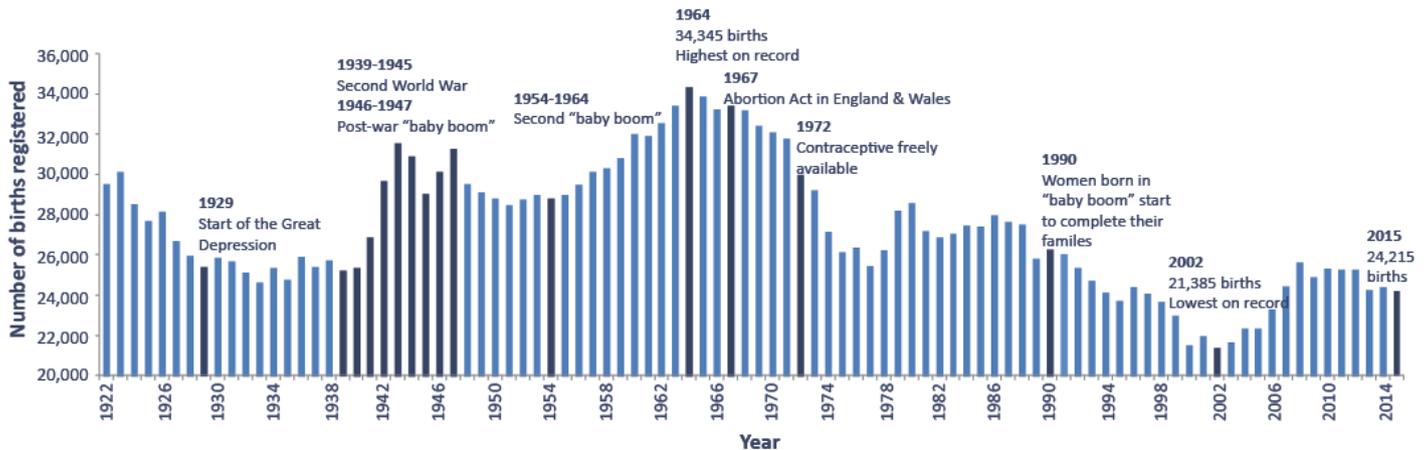
- There were 24,215 births (12,493 males and 11,722 females) registered to Northern Ireland mothers, 179 fewer than in 2014.
- The average age of mothers was 30.5 years, compared to 30.4 years in 2014.
- 22 per cent of all births were to mothers aged 35 years and over, up from 11 per cent 30 years ago.
- Teenage births reached a new record low of 760, down from 1,395 a decade ago.
- First time mothers accounted for 38 per cent of all births. 9.3 per cent of mothers already had 3 or more live born children, compared with 17 per cent in 1985, reflecting the trend towards smaller family sizes.
- 44 per cent of births occurred outside of marriage, a trend that has been gradually increasing over the years.
- Of the 23,936 maternities, 1.5 per cent resulted in multiple births; 343 sets of twins and 7 sets of triplets were born.
- 10 per cent of births were to mothers who were born outside the UK and Ireland. This compares with 5.0 per cent 10 years ago.

## Numbers

In 2015, there were 24,215 live births (12,493 males and 11,722 females) registered to Northern Ireland mothers, 179 fewer than in 2014. This equates to approximately 66 babies born every day in Northern Ireland. The number of births in 2015 continues to be much lower than the corresponding figure from 30 years ago when 27,427 births were registered.

**24,215 live births registered in 2015**

**Figure 1.9: Number of live births registered (1922 to 2015) – non-zero y-axis**



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The 1920's saw a gradual decrease in the number of births registered in Northern Ireland, to around 25,000 by the end of the decade. The number of births continued at an average of 25,000 per year during the time of The Great Depression in the late 1920's and 1930's. Interestingly, the number of births fluctuated somewhat during the Second World War (1939-1945) and increased in the years immediately following the end of the War. Around a decade after the end of the War, Northern Ireland experienced a "baby boom", with the number of births peaking at 34,345 in 1964. This was followed by a sharp decline during the late 1960's and 1970's coinciding with the early years of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. The drop in the number of births levelled off in the 1980's at around 27,000 births per annum, mainly as a result of the greater number of women, who were born in the baby boom, passing through their childbearing years. A decline in births followed in the 1990's, as these women started to complete their families, before levelling off at 22,000 during the early 2000's. A gradual increase in the number of live births then started in 2006, stabilising at around 25,000 between 2008 and 2012, before declining to around 24,000 births per year in 2013.

**Highest births on record – 1964:  
34,345**

**Lowest births on record – 2002:  
21,385**

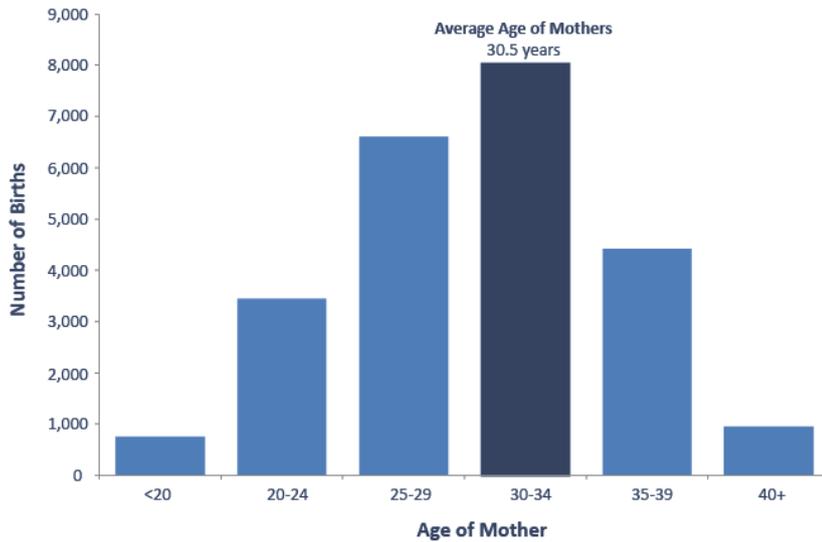
## Mother's Age

The average age of all mothers continues to increase, at 30.5 years compared with 29.6 in 2005 and 27.5 in 1985. For first time mothers, the average age was 28.4 years, compared with 27.1 in 2005 and 24.7 in 1985. Furthermore, 22 per cent of all births were to mothers aged 35 and

over. This compares with a figure of 11 per cent 30 years ago. These findings indicate that women are delaying child-bearing until later in life, a trend which is apparent throughout the developed world. This is in spite of the well documented decline in female fertility that occurs with age<sup>1</sup>. Women may be waiting to have children later in life for several reasons, including attainment of educational and professional goals, improved access to contraception and increasing age of marriage<sup>2</sup>. In addition, it has been

suggested that women may overestimate their 'fertility window' due to the success of assisted reproduction<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 1.10: Live births by Age of Mother (2015)**



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**Average age of all mothers — 30.5 years**

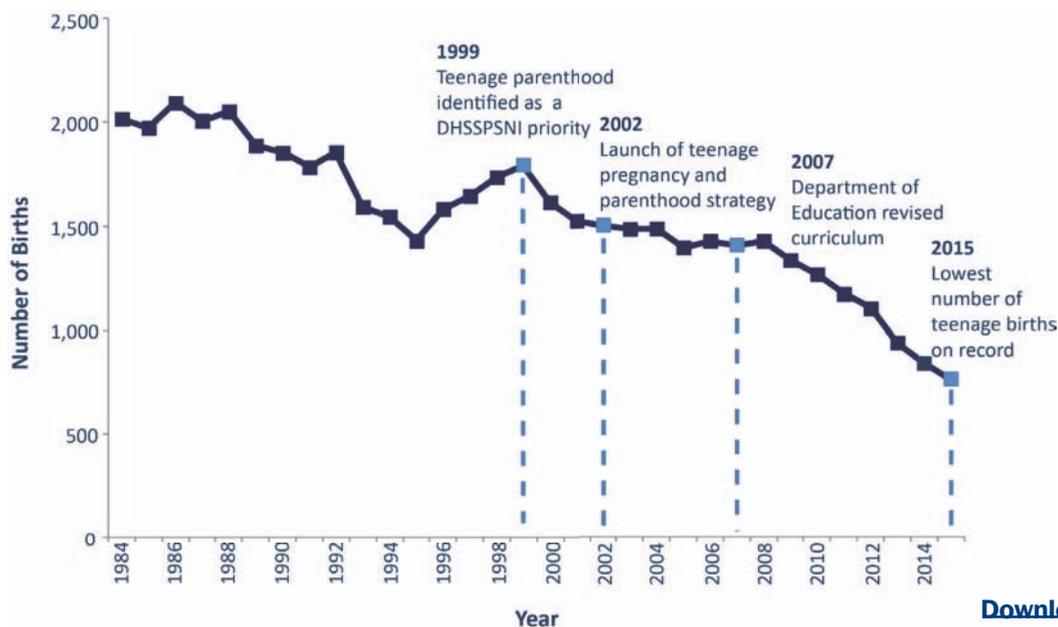
**Average age of 1st time mothers — 28.4 years**

Following the rise in births to teenage mothers in the mid 1990's, which peaked at 1,791 in 1999, the Department of Health launched the regional teenage pregnancy and parenthood strategy and action plan<sup>3</sup>. This policy aimed to reduce the number of births to teenage parents. Since 2002, the number of teenage births has seen a notable decline which may, in part, be due to the launch of the aforementioned strategy. Indeed, in 2015 the number of births to mothers aged under 20 years old continued to fall, reaching a new record low of 760 births registered. This is 9.4 per cent lower than in 2014 and approximately 46 per cent lower than in 2005 when there were 1,395 births to teenage mothers. In addition, the Department of Health strategy aimed to reduce the number of births to younger teenage mothers (i.e. those aged under 17 years old). Over the last decade, births to younger teenage mothers has more than halved from 145 to 66 births.

Since 2003 much of the focus from a Government perspective has been on educating teenagers, making resources widely available and providing assurances on confidentiality when seeking advice. In 2007, the Department of Education embarked on a revised curriculum which included compulsory components focused on self-awareness, personal health and relationships<sup>4</sup>. Since 2007 the number of births to teenage mothers has fallen by 46 per cent, which may in part be attributable to the changes in the curriculum.

## Record low of 760 births to teenage mothers

**Figure 1.11: Live births to Teenage Mothers, 1985 to 2015**



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## Father's Age

In 2015, the average age of all fathers<sup>i</sup> at the time of birth was 33.0 years compared to 30.2 years in 1985. More than two-thirds of the fathers were older than the mothers.

## Average age of all fathers – 33.0 years

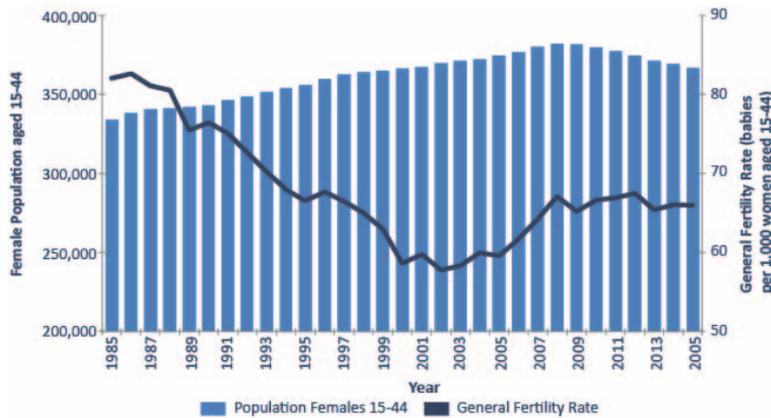
## Fertility Rates

Fertility rates can be measured in a variety of ways, and can be broadly broken into “period” measures and “cohort” measures. “Period” measures refer to a cross-section of the population in one year. “Cohort” data on the other hand, follows the same people over a period of decades. Both period and cohort measures are widely used.

<sup>i</sup> Excluding 1,275 or 5.3 per cent of births where no father's details were available.

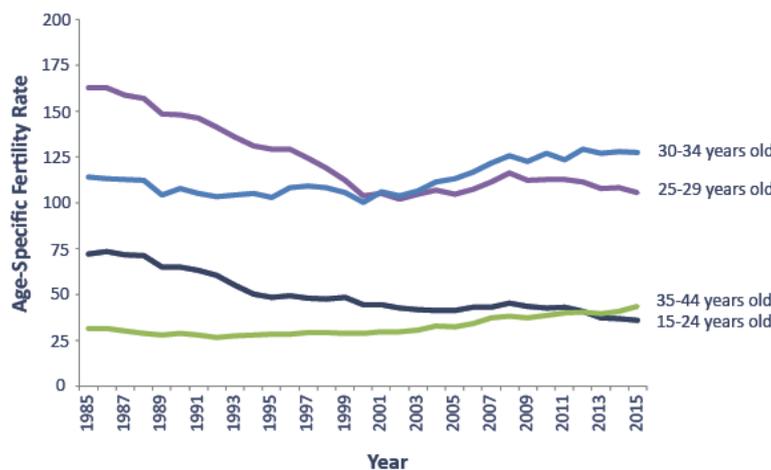
Period Measures

**Figure 1.12: Estimated female population aged 15 to 44 and general fertility rate (1985 to 2015) – non-zero y-axes**



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**Figure 1.13: Live births per 1,000 women by age group of mother (1985 to 2015)**



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The most commonly used period measures are the **Crude Birth Rate**<sup>i</sup> and the **General Fertility Rate**<sup>ii</sup>. Detailed definitions of both are available in Appendix 3, with the main difference being that the crude birth rate is based on the size of the general population and is therefore influenced by the age structure of the population, whereas the general fertility rate focuses on those most likely to have children, thus taking account of the age distribution.

The crude birth rate in Northern Ireland has been generally declining over time reaching a record low of 12.6 in 2002. By way of comparison, the crude birth rate in 2015 was 13.1 births per 1,000 population, which represents a slight reduction on the 2013 and 2014 rates (both 13.3).

The general fertility rate in a given year is best considered alongside the female population aged 15-44 for that year. In terms of trends, the population of females aged 15-44 increased between 1983 and 2008, before starting to decline thereafter. The general fertility rate on the other hand followed a downward trend from 1983 through to 2002, when it reached a record

low of 57.8 births per 1,000 females aged 15-44. Thereafter the trend was generally upward with the general fertility rate in 2015 equating to 66.0 births per 1,000 population aged 15 to 44 years old.

The recent trend towards later childbearing is most apparent in the decline in fertility rates among 15-24 year old females. Over the past three decades fertility for this age group has halved from 72.3 babies per 1,000 women in 1985 to 35.8 babies per 1,000 women in 2015.

<sup>i</sup> A crude rate refers to the number of occurrences of the event per 1,000 population.

<sup>ii</sup> General fertility rate is the number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years old.

In 2015, women aged 30-34 years experienced the highest age-specific fertility rate, with 127.6 babies per 1,000 women, while women aged 25-29 years experienced the second highest rate (105.4 babies per 1,000 women).

**Cohort measures**

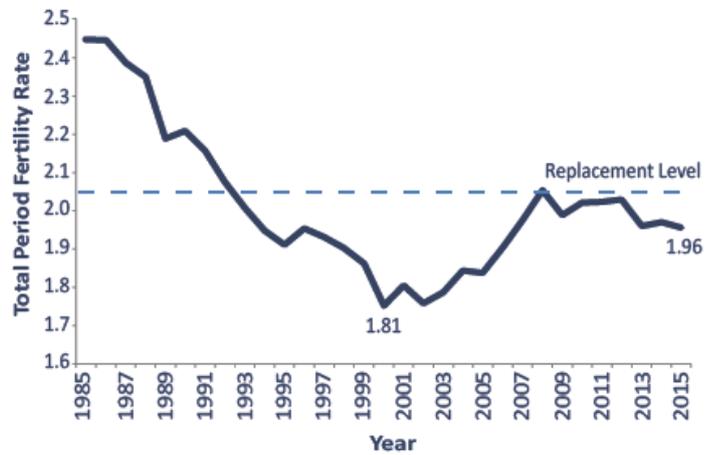
Other useful measures of fertility are the **Total Period Fertility Rate (TPFR)<sup>i</sup>** and **Completed Family Size<sup>ii</sup>**. Both are cohort measures meaning they track theoretical groups of women over time. The TPFR is simply the average number of live-born children a woman would have in her lifetime, and is derived from the sum of the age-specific fertility rates of a given year. A value of 2.1 is generally taken to be the level at which the population would replace itself in the long run, ignoring migration. The TPFR dropped below replacement level in Northern Ireland for the first time in 1992. In 2015 the TPFR was 1.96, which is a recovery from a record low of 1.75 in 2000, but still below the fertility rates in the 1980’s and early 1990’s.

Northern Ireland has the highest TPFR (1.97) of the constituent countries of the UK when comparing latest available figures for 2014. France is the only EU15 country with a higher TPFR (2.01) than that in Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup>, with the Republic of Ireland slightly below that of Northern Ireland (1.94).

A further measure of fertility is completed family size, which is a more accurate picture of fertility for a specific group of women born in a certain year. Family size at age 45 is taken to represent completed family size. This enables easy comparison between selected groups of women as they pass through the child-bearing ages.

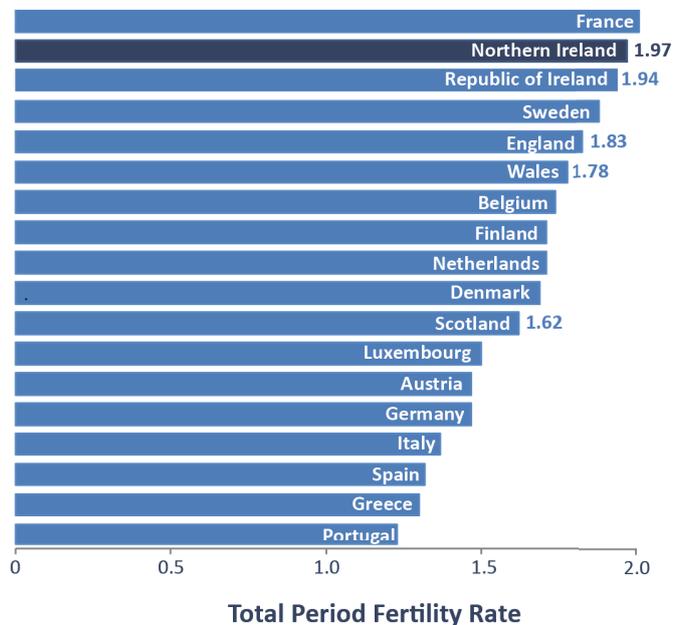
In Northern Ireland those women who were born

**Figure 1.14: Total period fertility rate (1985 to 2015) – non-zero y-axis**



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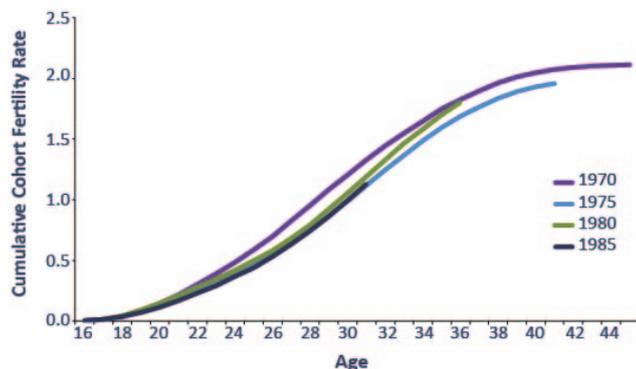
**Figure 1.15: Total period fertility rate, EU15 and Constituent Countries of the UK (2014)**



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i The TPFR is the average number of children that would be born to a cohort of women who experienced, throughout their childbearing years, the fertility rates of the calendar year in question  
 ii Completed Family Size is the average completed size of a family by the time the woman has reached 45 years old.

**Figure 1.16: Cumulative fertility rate for cohorts born in selected years**

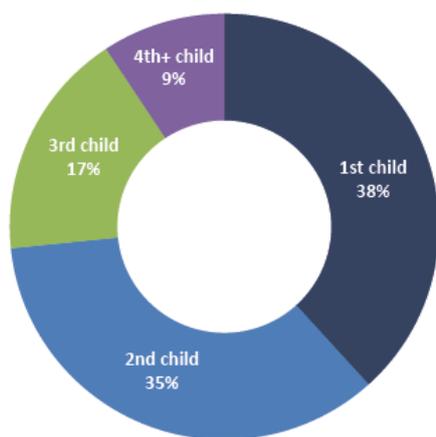


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in 1970 had attained an average completed family size of 2.1 children by the time they reached 45. By the age of 30 years, the family size of the 1985 group of women was 1.0 children compared to 1.2 children for the 1970 group of women. A key point in Figure 1.16 is how closely the fertility rate of the 1985 group of women tracks the 1975 group, with both being level at age 30. In addition, the 1980 group of women is ahead, in terms of fertility, of the 1975 group at the age of 30 years old.

Overall fertility rates have been falling in Northern Ireland over time. During the majority of the last century fertility has had the largest contribution to the population change, far exceeding the contributions of mortality and migration. While declining fertility rates can initially be beneficial in terms of economic growth; the proportion of children in the population falls and the proportion of working age increases. Over time however, this leads to a decline in the working age population and an aging population develops.

**Figure 1.17: Percentage of live births by number of previous children born (2015)**



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### Birth Order

Of the 24,215 births registered in Northern Ireland, 38 per cent were to first-time mothers, a slight decrease from 39 per cent in 2014. Second-time and third-time mothers represented 35 per cent and 17 per cent of births respectively. In 2015, 9.3 per cent of mothers already had 3 or more live born children, compared with 17 per cent in 1985, reflecting the trend towards smaller family sizes.

### Partnership Status of Parents

The number of births within marriage continues to show a decreasing trend. For example, a decade ago 64 per cent of births were to married parents, whereas in 2015 the comparable figure was noticeably lower at 56 per cent. Similarly, 44 per cent of all births in 2015 occurred outside marriage, proportionately more than the 36 per cent of such births a decade ago. This proportion has been steadily increasing since the early 1960's when the proportion of children born outside marriage was around 2 per cent. Declines in marital childbearing in Northern Ireland are consistent with figures throughout the United States<sup>6</sup> and European Union<sup>7</sup> including England and Wales<sup>8</sup>, Scotland<sup>9</sup> and Republic of Ireland<sup>10</sup>.



**Table 2: Percentage of maternities resulting in a multiple birth by age of mother, 2015**

	Age of Mother						
	Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+
Percentage of maternities resulting in a multiple birth	0.4	0.8	1.1	1.5	2.1	2.0	15.1

## 24 per cent of all babies were born in the Royal Group of Hospitals

Whilst the number of births fell at a number of hospitals, births at the Mater Hospital Belfast continued to show a sharp decline, falling from around 1,100 per annum prior to 2013 to 196 in 2015. A similar decrease in the number of babies delivered at Lagan Valley Hospital was also apparent, falling from around 1,100 prior to 2011 to approximately 200 in subsequent years. In contrast there was a sharp increase in the number of babies being delivered at the Ulster Hospital with 4,131 births last year compared to around 3,000 babies in the years prior to 2010.

In 2015, 93 babies were born in places other than a hospital, representing an increase of 16 per cent on the previous year. The majority of these babies (75) were born at home. Home births continue to represent a very small proportion of all births, but recent guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence<sup>11</sup> advise that a birth in either the home or a Midwifery Led Unit are thought to be equally safe for mothers who have previously given birth and who are considered to have a low risk pregnancy.



### Births by Area

Mid Ulster had the highest general fertility rate of all the 11 Local Government Districts, followed by Newry, Mourne & Down and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon, while the lowest general fertility rates were in Mid & East Antrim and Ards & North Down.

At Health and Social Care Trust level, general fertility rates ranged from 61.5 births per 1,000 females aged 15-44 in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to 73.3 births per 1,000 females aged 15-44 in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

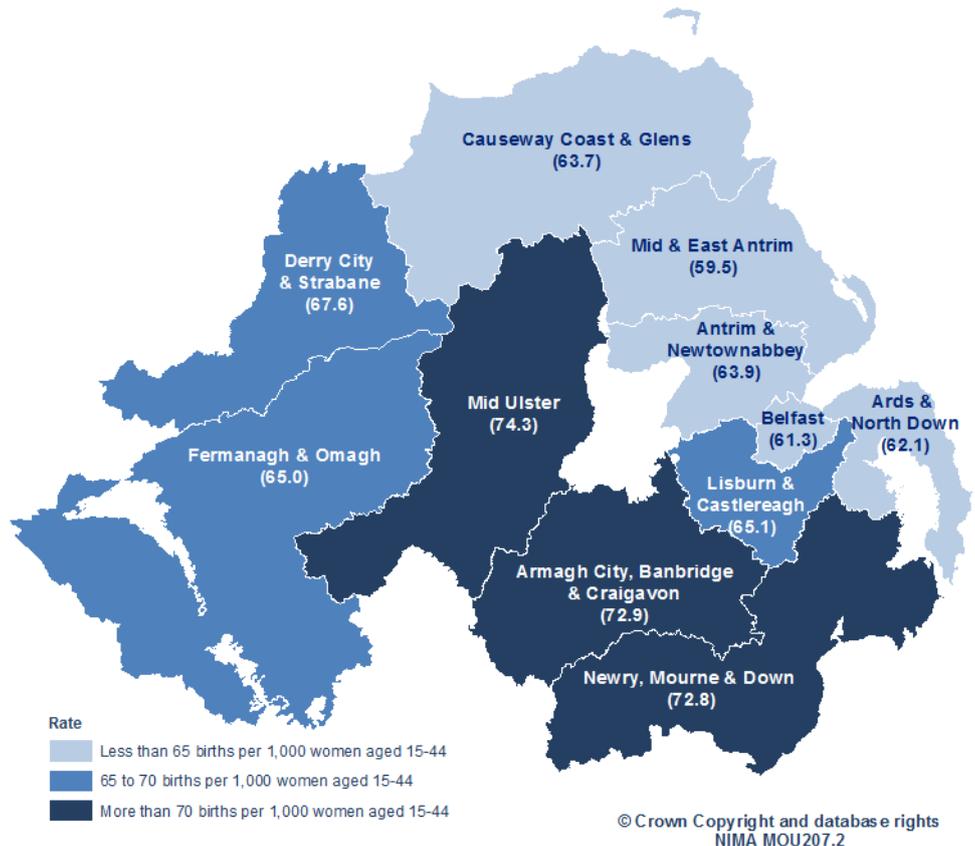
## Country of Birth of Parents

In 2015, 18 per cent of all births were to mothers who were born outside Northern Ireland. Of the 4,247 such births, 43 per cent were to mothers who were born either elsewhere in the United Kingdom or in the Republic of Ireland, a noticeable drop from the comparable figure in 2005 (66 per cent). In contrast, there has been a sharp rise in the number of births to mothers who were born in the A8 countries<sup>i</sup>, increasing from 118 births in 2005 to 1,205 births in 2015. This change has been partly driven by women coming to live in Northern Ireland from the A8 countries that joined the European Union in 2004.

The percentage of births to mothers born outside the UK and Ireland was 10 per cent in 2015. This percentage was first reached in 2013 and is significantly higher than the 5.0 per cent of births registered to these mothers 10 years ago.

For births where the mother was born in Northern Ireland, 85 per cent had a father who was also born in Northern Ireland. For births where the mother was born in the rest of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, the majority of fathers (85 per cent) were not born in these regions, with 76 per cent from Northern Ireland. The trend is different for children whose mother was born in an A8 country, where 78 per cent of these children have a father who was also born in an A8 country.

**Figure 1.19: Live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, by Local Government District (2015)**

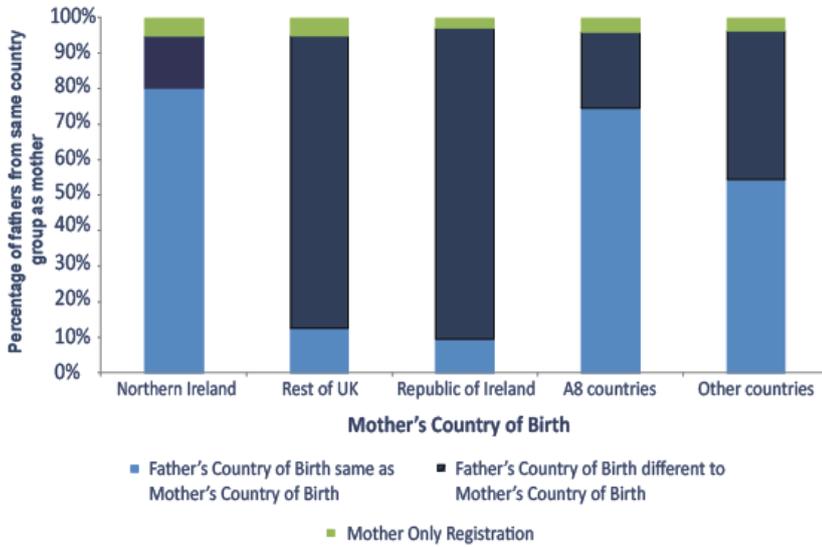


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**10 per cent of births to mothers born outside the UK and Ireland**

<sup>i</sup> The A8 countries are a group of the 10 countries that joined the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004 and include the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Malta and Cyprus also joined the EU in 2004 but are considered separately from the A8 countries as they have full free movement rights to work throughout the EU.

**Figure 1.20: Live births in Northern Ireland by mother’s and father’s country of birth (2015)**



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### Births to Non-Residents

The statistics presented in this report relate to mothers living in Northern Ireland, however all births occurring in the country must be registered here. In 2015, 210 births were registered where the mother lived outside Northern Ireland, 11 fewer births than the previous year (221). The vast majority of these births (92 per cent) were to mothers living in the Republic of Ireland giving birth in hospitals near the border, primarily Altnagelvin Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital.