

# Births, deaths and other vital events

## Fourth quarter 2020

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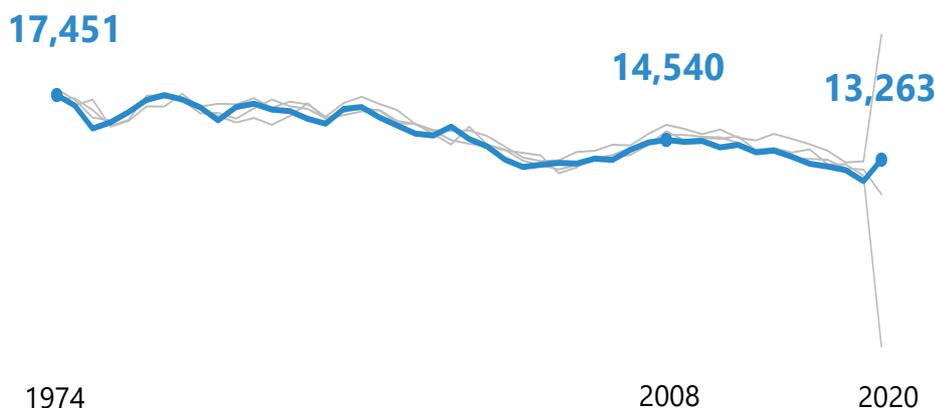


This release presents provisional figures for vital events which were registered in Scotland in the period from 1 October to 31 December 2020, inclusive. The tables provide statistics of births, stillbirths, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths.

**Birth registrations affected by closures**

13,263 births were registered in 2020 quarter 4. The number of births in each quarter of 2020 does not reflect the actual number of births. The Q2 figure was very low due to closure of registration offices, and Q3 registrations were very high as registrars caught up with the backlog. Q4 also included some postponed registrations.

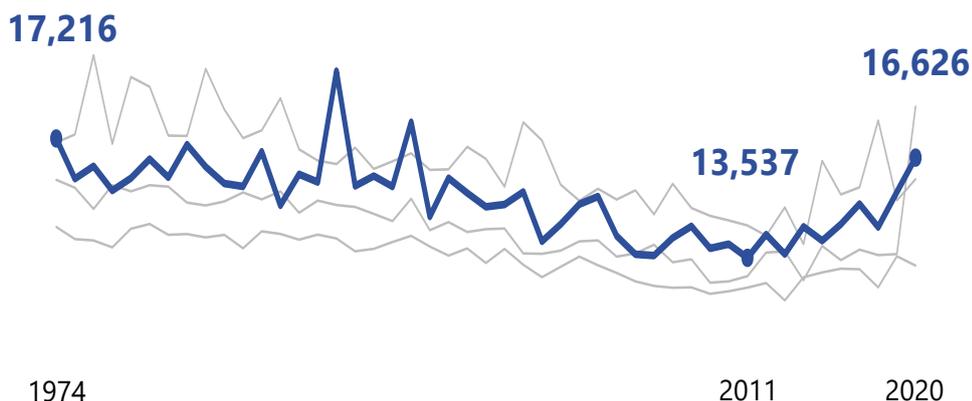
Number of births by quarter (Q1, Q2, Q3, **Q4**)



**Deaths were 12.5% higher than average**

16,626 deaths were registered in October - December 2020. That's a 12.5% increase compared with the five year average.

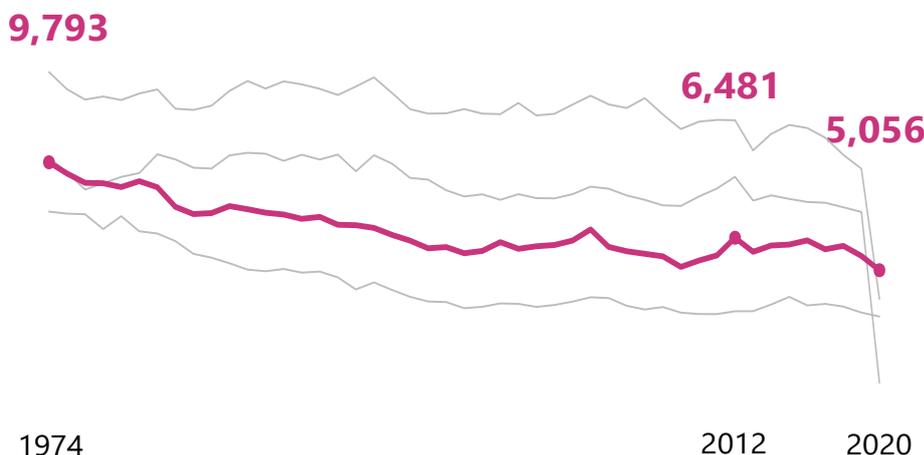
Number of deaths by quarter (Q1, Q2, Q3, **Q4**)



**Marriages were 16.7% lower than average.**

There were 5,056 marriages in 2020 quarter 4. This is more than 1,000 fewer than the average of 6,066 for October - December over the previous five years.

Number of marriages by quarter (Q1, Q2, Q3, **Q4**)



Ceremonies have been able to take place on a restricted basis since late June.

## Contents

1.	Main points .....	5
2.	Introduction.....	7
3.	Commentary.....	7
4.	Background to these statistics.....	9
	Notes on statistical publications.....	11
	Related organisations .....	11

## List of tables

Table Q1 Births, stillbirths, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships, numbers and rates, Scotland, quarterly, 2010 to 2020

Table Q2 Estimated population, births, stillbirths, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships, numbers and rates, by administrative area, Scotland, fourth quarter, 2020

Table Q3 Deaths, by sex, age and administrative area, Scotland, fourth quarter, 2020

Table Q4 Deaths, by cause, Scotland, fourth quarter 2015-2020

Table Q5 Deaths by sex, age and cause, Scotland, fourth quarter, 2020

Table Q6 Deaths by sex, cause and NHS Board area, Scotland, fourth quarter, 2020

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Births, deaths and marriages registered in rolling periods of four quarters, 1974-2020

Figure 2 Age-standardised death rates for rolling periods of four quarters, 1990-2020

The [tables and charts](#) above have been made available as Excel spreadsheets and can also be viewed in Comma Separated Value (CSV) format.

## 1. Main points

- There were 13,263 births and 16,626 deaths registered in Scotland between 1 October and 31 December 2020.
- In mid-March 2020 registration offices closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and registration of births was postponed. Birth registration restarted in late June and most of the postponed registrations have now taken place. The number of birth registrations in each quarter of 2020 does not reflect the actual number of births in each quarter. Quarter two registrations were very low due to the closure and quarter three registrations were very high as registrars caught up with the backlog. Registrations in quarter four are also impacted by this as in some areas the backlog was still being cleared at this time.
- At 16,626, the number of deaths in 2020 quarter four is 12.5 per cent higher than the quarter four average over the previous five years – an excess of 1,849 deaths.
- This takes the provisional annual total for 2020 to 64,085; 11.0 per cent above the average of the previous five years (57,760). Over the course of the year, quarter one was broadly in line with the average (-1.2%), quarter two had a 33.0 per cent excess, quarter three returned to broadly in line with the average (+1.2%) and quarter four was 12.5% above average.
- Expressed as a rate, there were 12.1 deaths per 1,000 population in quarter four.
- The age-standardised mortality rate for the four-quarter period ending in 2020 quarter 4 was 1.3 per cent higher than the previous four-quarter period (ending 2020 quarter 3). This rate takes into account the growing and ageing population and is therefore the best indicator of the direction of the mortality trend.
- Compared with the four-quarter period ending in 2019 quarter 4, the age-standardised mortality rate for the period ending in 2020 quarter 4 was 8.9% higher.
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) was the underlying cause of 2,093 deaths during quarter four.
- Compared with the quarter four average over the previous five years, 2015-2019:
  - The number of cancer deaths fell by 1.1 per cent to 4,113;
  - The number of deaths from coronary heart disease was unchanged at 1,738;
  - The number of deaths from dementia and Alzheimer's disease fell by 7.3 per cent to 1,516;
  - Deaths from respiratory diseases fell by 30.3 per cent to 1,234;
  - There were 988 deaths from cerebrovascular disease (a decrease of 4.3 per cent).
- There were 5,056 marriages, compared with an average of 6,066 fourth quarter marriages for the previous five years. Registration offices closed in mid-March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and most marriages and civil partnerships could not take place. Ceremonies have been able to take place on a restricted basis since late June.

- There were 183 same-sex marriages, compared with a five-year average of 238 for quarter four.
- There were 27 civil partnerships registered in the fourth quarter, compared to an average of 20 in the fourth quarter for the previous five years.

## 2. Introduction

This release presents provisional figures for vital events which were registered in Scotland in the period from 1 October to 31 December 2020, inclusive. The tables and chart provide statistics of births, stillbirths, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths, including:

- quarterly figures for Scotland for each of the past ten years;
- the totals for each Local Authority and NHS Board area for the latest quarter; and
- more detailed analyses of the numbers of deaths (for example cross-classified by sex, cause and NHS Board area) for the latest quarter.

## 3. Commentary

The impact of the postponement of birth registration in the spring is still being seen in the four quarter of 2020. In mid-March 2020 registration offices closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and registration of births was postponed. Birth registration restarted in late June and most of the postponed registrations have now taken place. The number of birth registrations in each quarter of 2020 does not reflect the actual number of births in each quarter. Quarter two registrations were very low due to the closure and quarter three registrations were very high as registrars caught up with the backlog. Registrations in quarter four are also impacted by this as in some areas the backlog was still being cleared at this time.

The number of deaths registered in the fourth quarter of 2020 (16,626) was the highest quarter four total since 1993 (17,718).

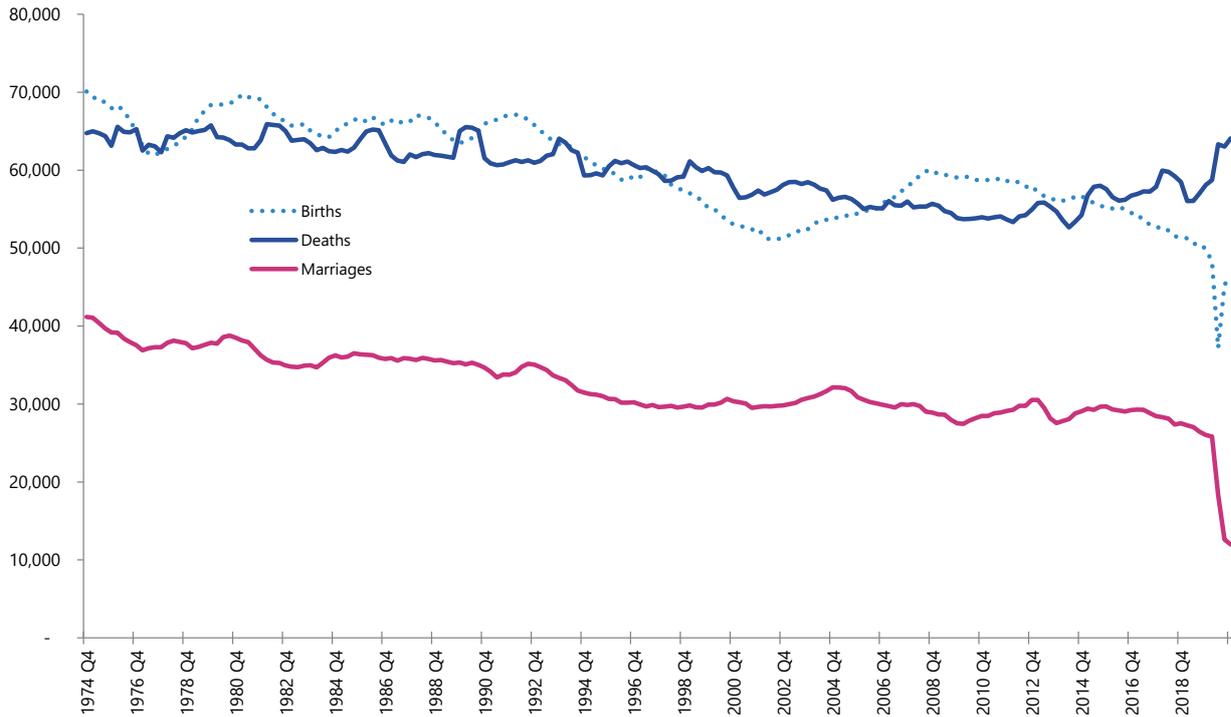
The number of deaths from cancer, dementia and Alzheimer's disease, respiratory diseases and cerebrovascular disease all fell compared with the fourth quarter average over the previous five years, 2015-2019. The number of deaths from coronary heart disease was the same as the five-year average.

Expressed as a rate, there were 12.1 deaths per 1,000 population.

The [quarterly tables](#), which can be downloaded from the National Records of Scotland (NRS) website, contain further detailed statistics on births, deaths and other vital events, including figures for NHS Boards and local authority areas.

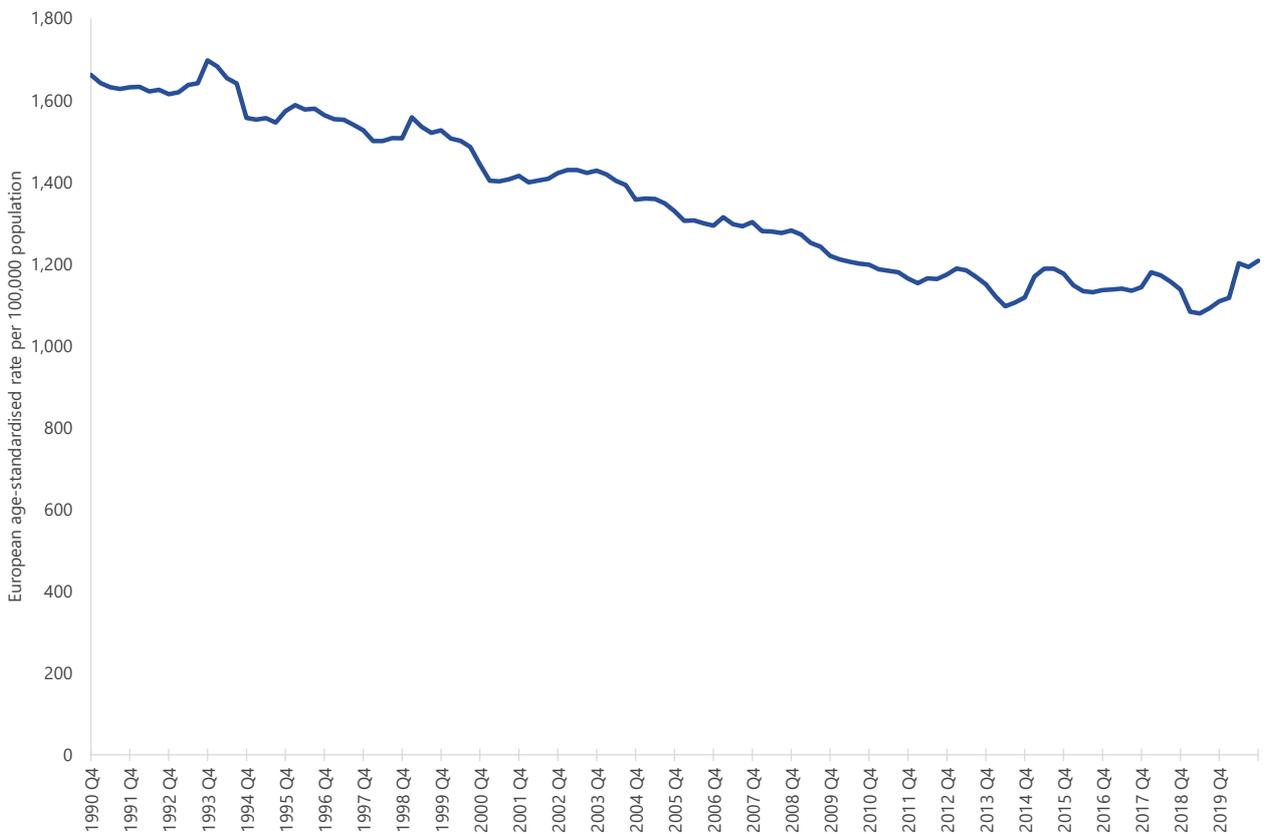
For the four quarters (2020 Q1 to 2020 Q4) there were 46,802 births and 64,085 deaths, a shortfall of 17,283 births compared to deaths. This gap may be artificially high as some postponed birth registrations may still be being processed, although the numbers remaining are likely to be small. Having less births than deaths in a population is referred to as 'negative natural change', meaning that without external factors (such as migration) the population will fall. Scotland has been in a position of negative natural change since the period ending 2015 Q1. Prior to this, there was a sustained period of positive natural change (i.e. more births than deaths) going back to 2006. As can be seen from figure 1, the gap between births and deaths has fluctuated over time and there have been several periods of both positive and negative natural change over the last 40 years.

**Figure 1: Births, deaths and marriages registered in rolling periods of four quarters**



Note: The number of birth registrations in the quarters of 2020 do not reflect the number of births which occurred.

**Figure 2: Age-standardised death rates for rolling periods of four quarters**



Given the increasing interest in the changing direction of the mortality trend, we publish age-standardised mortality rates on a quarterly basis in addition to the annual update. Figure 2 illustrates the age-standardised mortality rates for each four-quarter period from the period ending 1990 Q4 to that ending 2020 Q4. These figures are based on rolling periods of four quarters to reduce fluctuations and reduce seasonal variation. There is a large degree of seasonality in mortality, with higher number of deaths occurring in winter than in summer, so it does not make sense to compare a quarter 2 figure with a quarter 1 figure, for example.

Despite the attempts to reduce fluctuations, it is clear that there are still considerable fluctuations in the time series. Particularly of note in the most recent period are the increases in early 2015 and 2018 due to high winter mortality in quarter one of these years. As these rates are based on rolling four quarter periods, the impact of the high quarter one is also seen in the figures for the following three data points before dropping out when the next year's quarter one figure is picked up.

The rate for the four quarter period ending 2020 Q4 was 1.3 per cent higher than that for the period ending 2020 Q3.

The longer term trend shows a clear decrease over time, although there have been fluctuations along the way. Until recently, the period ending 2014 Q2 represented the lowest point in the trend with 1,096.8 deaths per 100,000 population. There was little change over the following few years (with the two notable fluctuations previously discussed in 2015 and 2018) and the 2019 Q1 and Q2 rates of 1,083.6 and 1,079.3 per 100,000, represented slight decreases from the previous low point in 2014 Q2. The rate then rose to reach 1,201.8 per 100,000 population in 2020 Q2, fell slightly to the 2020 Q3 figure of 1,192.6 and rose again to 1,208.0 in 2020 Q4. The coronavirus pandemic will have contributed to the high rates in 2020 Q2, Q3 and Q4 and it will be important to monitor rates going forward to see whether they return to previous levels.

#### **4. Background to these statistics**

This is a quarterly publication. NRS collects the underlying data on a daily basis, as and when each event is registered. The statistics for 2020 are all provisional.

Information about (for example) the sources, methods, definitions and reliability of these statistics is available from the following NRS web site pages general background information on Vital Events statistics and background information on points which are specific to statistics about deaths. These figures are directly comparable with those for other parts of the UK, there are no significant differences across the UK in how Vital Events data are collected and processed.

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, and
- 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.

More detailed commentary on the final Vital Events statistics for calendar years as a whole (including some comparisons of the figures for different years, for parts of Scotland and for some other countries) can be found in the relevant chapters of Scotland's Population - the Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends.

## Notes on statistical publications

### National Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#) (available on the UK Statistics Authority website).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

### Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy can be found in the 'About this Publication' document that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

### National Records of Scotland

We, the National Records of Scotland, are a non-ministerial department of the devolved Scottish Administration. Our purpose is to collect, preserve and produce information about Scotland's people and history and make it available to inform current and future generations. We do this as follows:

- Preserving the past – We look after Scotland's national archives so that they are available for current and future generations, and we make available important information for family history.
- Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.
- Informing the future – We are responsible for the Census of Population in Scotland which we use, with other sources of information, to produce statistics on the population and households.

You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the [Statistics](#) section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the [Scotland's Census](#) website.

We also provide information about [future publications](#) on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government [ScotStat website](#).

You can also follow us on twitter [@NatRecordsScot](#)

### **Enquiries and suggestions**

Please get in touch if you need any further information, or have any suggestions for improvement.

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