

Births, deaths and other vital events

First quarter 2021

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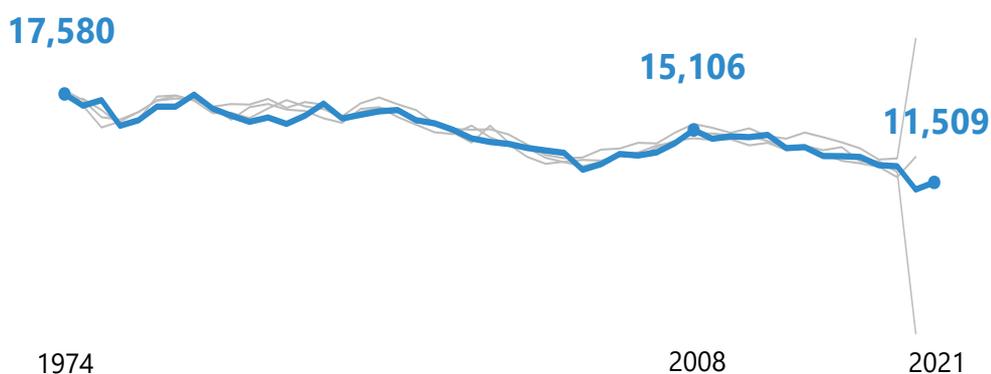


This release presents provisional figures for vital events which were registered in Scotland in the period from 1 January to 31 March 2021, inclusive. The tables provide statistics of births, stillbirths, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths.

Births were 8.5% lower than average

11,509 births were registered in 2021 quarter 1. This is 8.5 per cent fewer than the quarter one average over the previous five years.

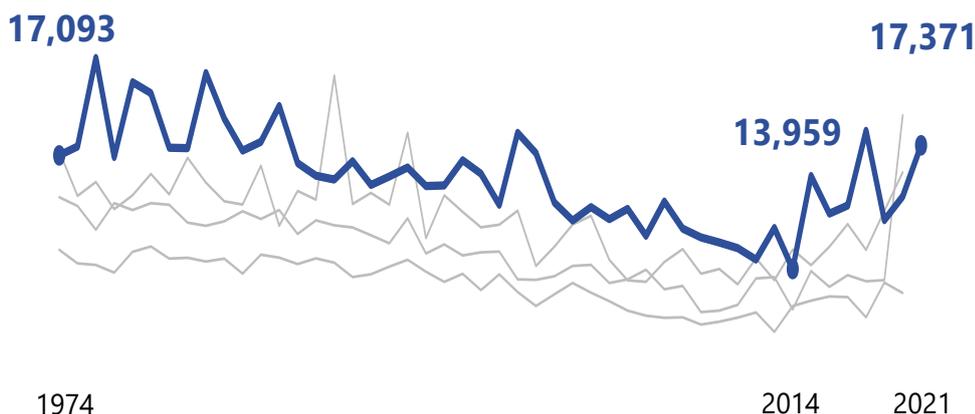
Number of births by quarter (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4)



Deaths were 8.2% higher than average

17,371 deaths were registered in January - March 2021. That's 8.2% higher than the five year average.

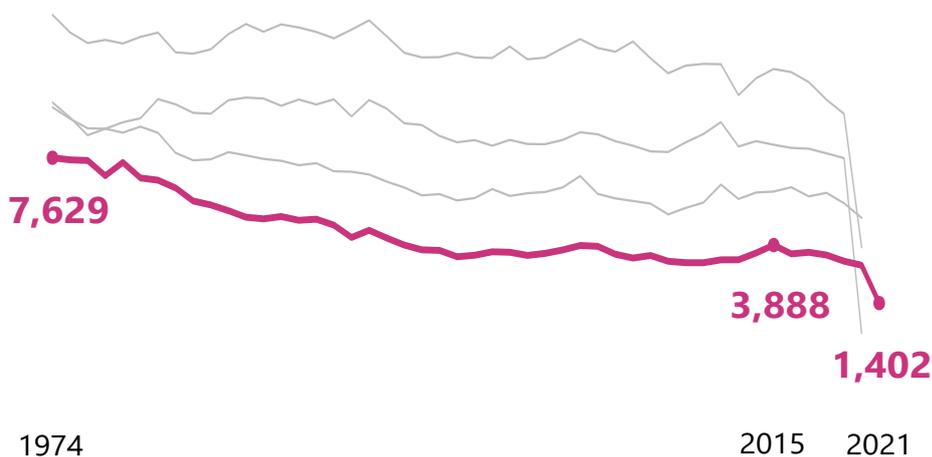
Number of deaths by quarter (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4)



Marriages were 16.7% lower than average.

There were 1,402 marriages in 2021 quarter 1. This is nearly 2,000 fewer than the average of 3,355 for January - March 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 2020.

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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 11,509 births and 17,371 deaths registered in Scotland between 1 January and 31 March 2021.
- At 17,371, the number of deaths in 2021 quarter one is 8.2 per cent higher than the quarter one average over the previous five years – an excess of 1,324 deaths.
- Expressed as a rate, there were 12.9 deaths per 1,000 population in quarter one of 2021.
- The age-standardised mortality rate for the four-quarter period ending in 2021 quarter 1 was 1.9 per cent higher than the previous four-quarter period (ending 2020 quarter 4). This rate takes into account the growing and ageing population and is therefore the best indicator of the direction of the mortality trend.
- Over the last year the age-standardised mortality rate has increased by 10%.
- Compared with the quarter one average over the previous five years:
 - The number of cancer deaths fell by 3.9 per cent to 3,961;
 - The number of deaths from coronary heart disease fell by 3.0 per cent to 1,767;
 - The number of deaths from dementia and Alzheimer's disease fell by 19.9 per cent to 1,470;
 - Deaths from respiratory diseases fell by 42.4 per cent to 1,293;
 - There were 1,002 deaths from cerebrovascular disease (a decrease of 8.7 per cent.)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) was the underlying cause of 2,779 deaths during quarter one.
- There were 1,402 marriages compared with an average of 3,355 first 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 2020.
- There were 57 same-sex marriages, compared with a five-year average of 136 for quarter one.
- There were 12 civil partnerships registered in the first quarter, compared to an average of 14 in the first 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 January to 31 March 2021, inclusive. The tables and chart provide statistics on 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

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 2020 and the postponed registrations have now all 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 of 2020 were also impacted by this as in some areas the backlog was still being cleared at that time.

Births in 2021 quarter one were 4.4% higher than in quarter one of 2020. There were 8.5 births per 1,000 population.

The number of deaths registered in the first quarter of 2021 (17,371) was the highest quarter one total since 2018 (17,771). The 2018 figure was unusually high, and was more than 2,000 above the average of the preceding 5 years. Prior to this the highest quarter 1 total was 17,715 in 1999.

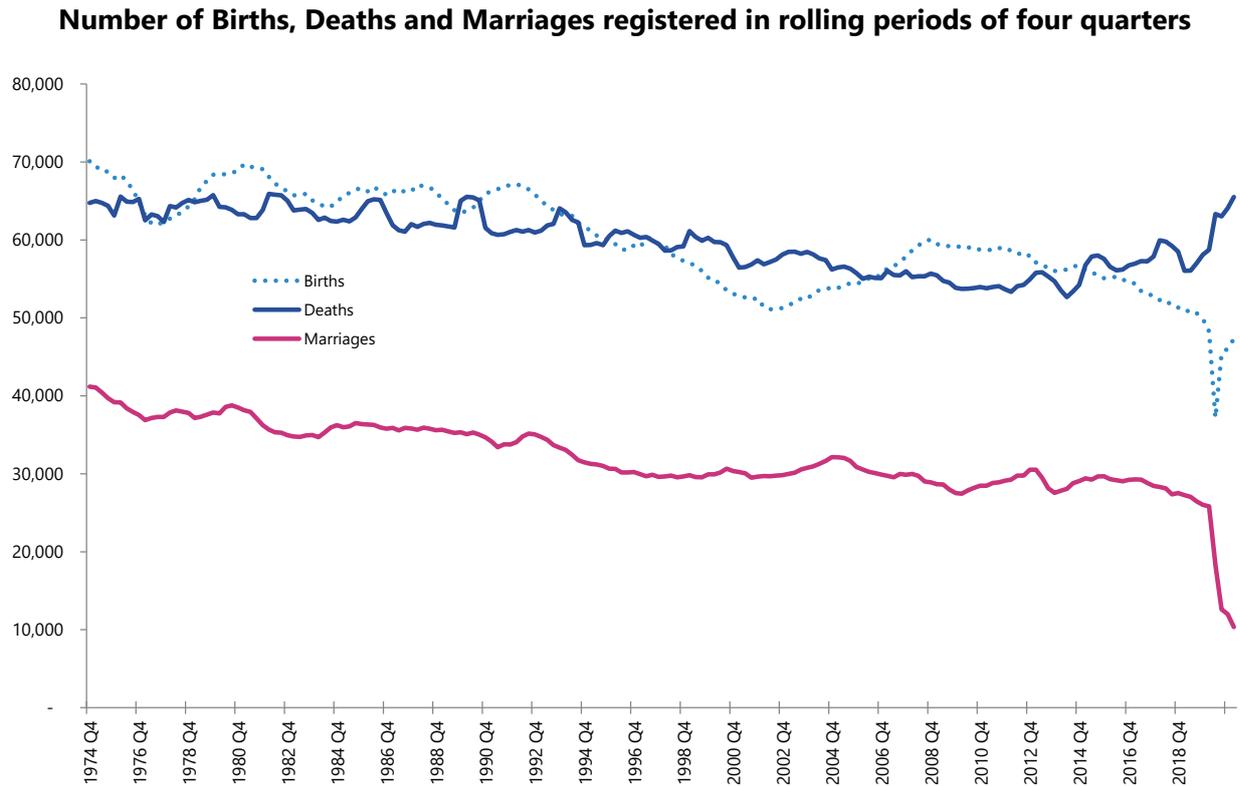
The number of deaths from cancer, coronary heart disease and cerebrovascular disease were all slightly lower than the first quarter average for the previous five years, 2016-2020. Dementia and Alzheimer's deaths and respiratory deaths were considerably lower than the five year average.

Expressed as a rate, there were 12.9 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 Q2 to 2021 Q1) there were 47,296 births and 65,504 deaths, a shortfall of 18,208 births compared to deaths. 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

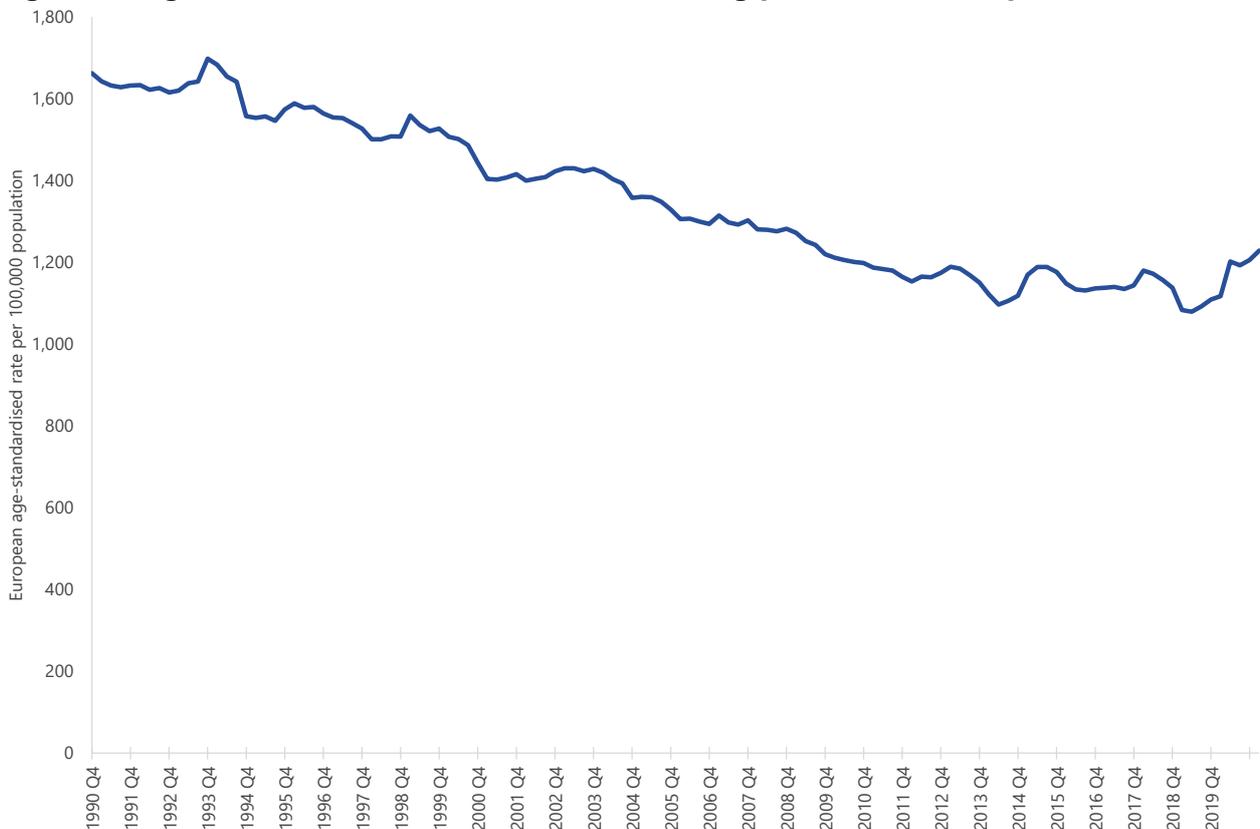


Figure 2 illustrates the age-standardised mortality rates for each four-quarter period from the period ending 1990 Q4 to that ending 2021 Q1. These figures are based on rolling periods of four quarters to reduce fluctuations and reduce seasonal variation. There is a large degree of seasonality in mortality, 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 variation, it is clear that there are still considerable fluctuations in the time series. Particularly of note in the most recent period prior to the coronavirus pandemic, 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 2021 Q1 was 1.9 per cent higher than that for the period ending 2020 Q4.

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 has risen since that point to reach 1,228.6 in 2021 Q1, the highest rate since 2009 Q3 . The coronavirus pandemic will have contributed to the high rates in recent quarters, 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 and 2021 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](#).

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Enquiries and suggestions

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

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