

Births, deaths and other vital events

Fourth quarter 2023

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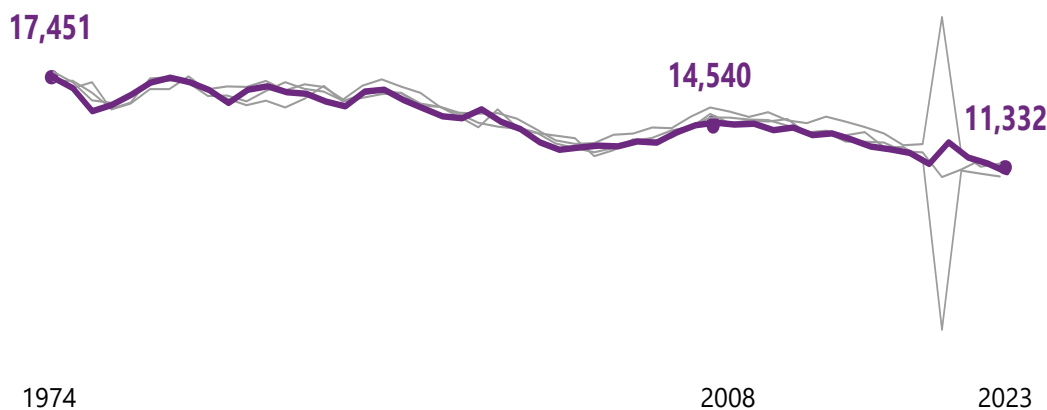


This release presents provisional figures for vital events which were registered in Scotland in the period from 1 October to 31 December 2023, inclusive. The tables provide statistics of births, stillbirths, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths.

The number of births was 8% lower than average

11,332 births were registered in 2023 quarter 4. This figure is 7.8 per cent lower than the quarter 4 average.

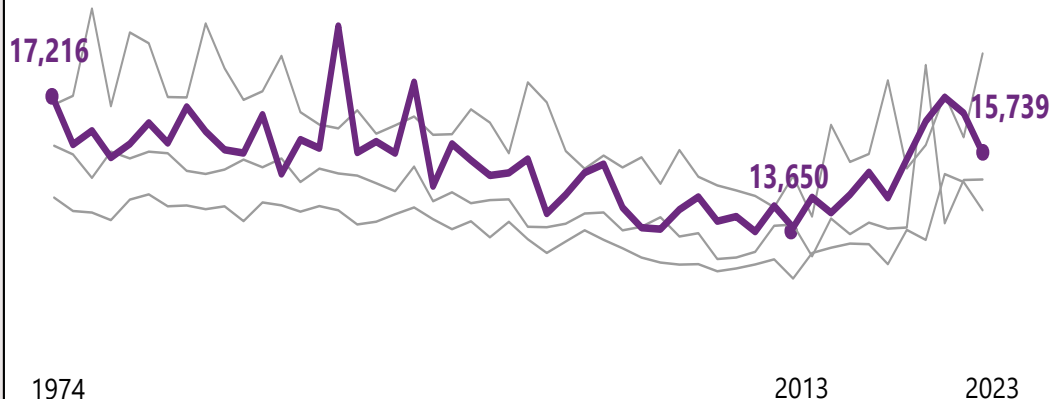
Number of births by quarter (Q1 Q2, Q3, **Q4**)



The number of deaths was 7% lower than expected

15,739 deaths were registered in October - December 2023. That's 6.9% lower than the expected number of deaths, which was 16,898..

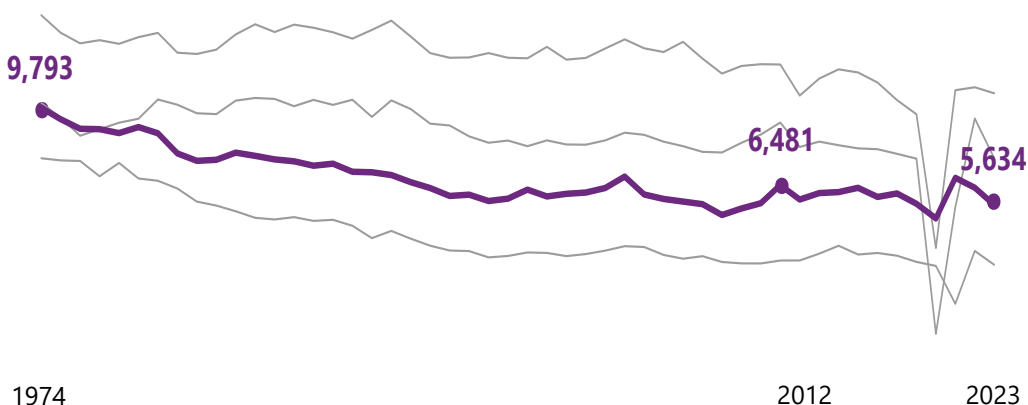
Number of deaths by quarter (Q1, Q2, Q3, **Q4**)



Marriages were 9% below average

There were 5,634 marriages in 2023 quarter 4. This was 9.0% lower than average for the fourth quarter of the year.

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



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The [tables and charts](#) above have been made available as Excel spreadsheets.

1. Main points

- There were 11,332 births registered in Scotland between 1 October and 31 December 2023. This is 7.8 per cent lower than the quarter four average of 12,289.
- At 15,739 the number of deaths in 2023 quarter four is 6.9 per cent lower than the expected number of deaths, which was 16,898.
- There were 46 stillbirths (4.0 per 1,000 live and still births) in quarter four of 2023. This is the same number as the quarter four average.
- The infant death rate was 3.4 (per 1,000 live births) in the fourth quarter of 2023. This is lower than in the first three quarters of 2023 but there has been a generally increasing trend in the infant death rate since 2020.
- There were 5,634 marriages in quarter four of 2023. This was 9.0% lower than the recent average.
- There were 232 same-sex marriages, compared with a five-year average of 235.
- Since June 2021 mixed-sex couples have been able to form a civil partnership. Of the 183 civil partnerships registered in the fourth quarter of 2023, 146 involved mixed-sex couples.
- There were 37 same-sex civil partnerships, compared with a five-year average of 23.

Comparing against the expected number of deaths

Excess deaths is the difference between the observed number of deaths in a particular period and the number of deaths that would have been expected in that period, based on historical data. The expected number of deaths is estimated from age-specific mortality rates rather than death counts, so trends in population size and age structure are taken into account. This new method for calculating excess deaths has been adopted by statistical agencies across the UK. More information about this can be found in the methodology paper on the [ONS website](#).

Comparing against the five year average

Comparisons for statistics (other than deaths) are usually made by comparing the current year to the average for the previous five years. For 2023, standard practice would be to compare against the 2018-2022 average.

As the 2020 figures were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – marriages were much lower than usual and registration of births was delayed – comparing the 2023 figures to an average including 2020 would not give a true reflection of how the latest quarter's figures compare to the average.

2023 comparisons have therefore been made against the 5 years 2017-2019 plus 2021-2022.

2. Introduction

This release presents provisional figures for vital events which were registered in Scotland in the period from 1 October to 31 December 2023, inclusive. The tables and charts 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.

The quarterly tables can be downloaded from the [National Records of Scotland \(NRS\) website](#).

2. Births

At 11,332, live birth registrations in 2023 quarter four were 7.8% lower than the average for quarter four. We would usually use quarter four of the preceding five years as a comparison (2018-2022), but the registration of births was affected in 2020 by the closure of registration offices, due to COVID-19. 2023 comparisons have therefore been made against the 5 years 2017-2019 plus 2021-2022.

Expressed as a rate there were 8.2 live births per 1,000 population.

There were 46 stillbirths (4.0 per 1,000 live and still births) in the fourth quarter of 2023. This is the same number as the quarter four average.

3. Deaths

In the fourth quarter of 2023 there were 15,739 deaths. This 6.9 per cent lower than the expected number of deaths at 16,898.

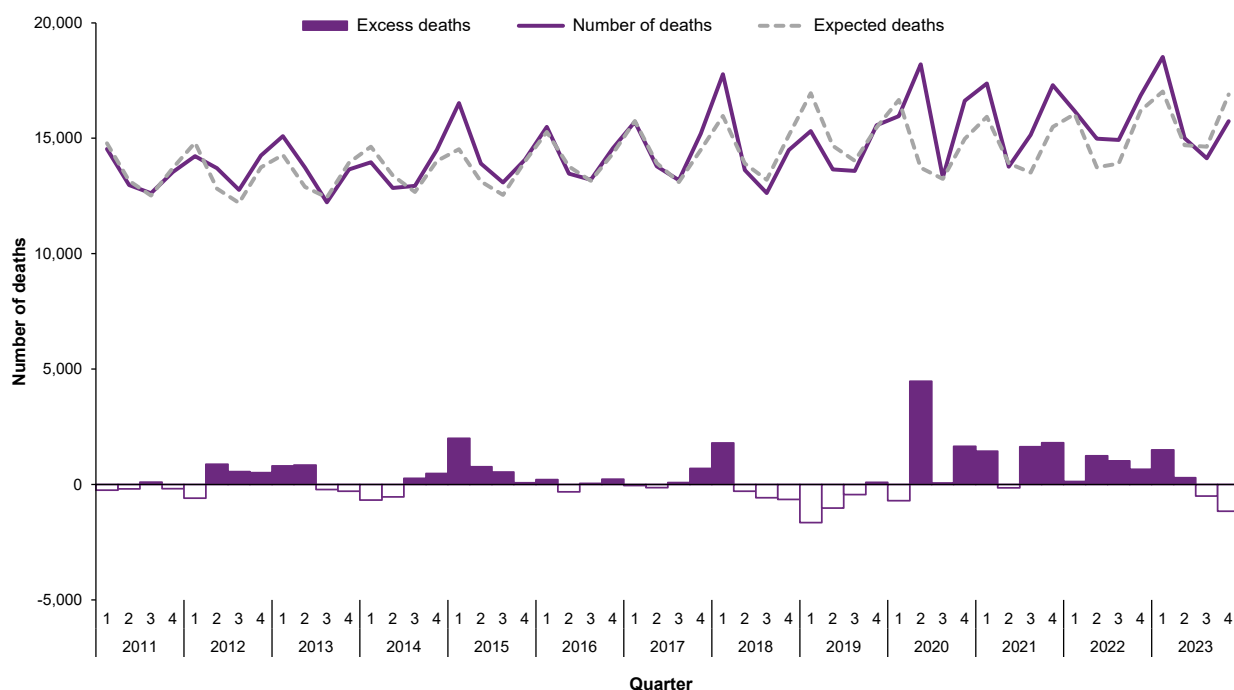
Expressed as a rate, there were 11.4 deaths per 1,000 population.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of deaths registered each quarter since 2011, and shows the trend in expected deaths and excess deaths. For much of the last four years we have had excess deaths, with the highest quarterly excess deaths seen in 2020 quarter two.

In the two most recent quarters the number of deaths registered has been lower than the expected number of deaths.

A new method for calculating excess deaths has been adopted by statistical agencies across the UK. The new method of calculating expected and excess deaths takes into account trends in population size and age structure. More information about this can be found in the methodology paper on the [ONS website](#).

Figure 1: Deaths, expected deaths and excess deaths in Scotland, by quarter



In quarter four of 2023 there were:

- 4,047 deaths from cancer;
- 1,672 deaths from coronary heart disease;
- 1,671 deaths from respiratory diseases;
- 1,758 deaths from dementia and Alzheimer’s disease;
- 958 deaths from cerebrovascular disease.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) was the underlying cause of 310 deaths during quarter four and there were no deaths where the underlying cause was adverse effects of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The infant death rate (deaths within the first year of life) was 3.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in the fourth quarter of 2023. This is lower than in the first three quarters of 2023 but there has been a generally increasing trend in the infant death rate since 2020.

4. Marriages and civil partnerships

There were 5,634 marriages in quarter 4 of 2023. This was 9.0% lower than than the recent average. The number of marriages began to increase after the restrictions (which were first put in place in quarter 2 of 2020) were eased. Quarter three of 2021 was the first to return to pre-pandemic levels.

There were 232 same-sex marriages, compared with a five-year average of 235 for quarter four.

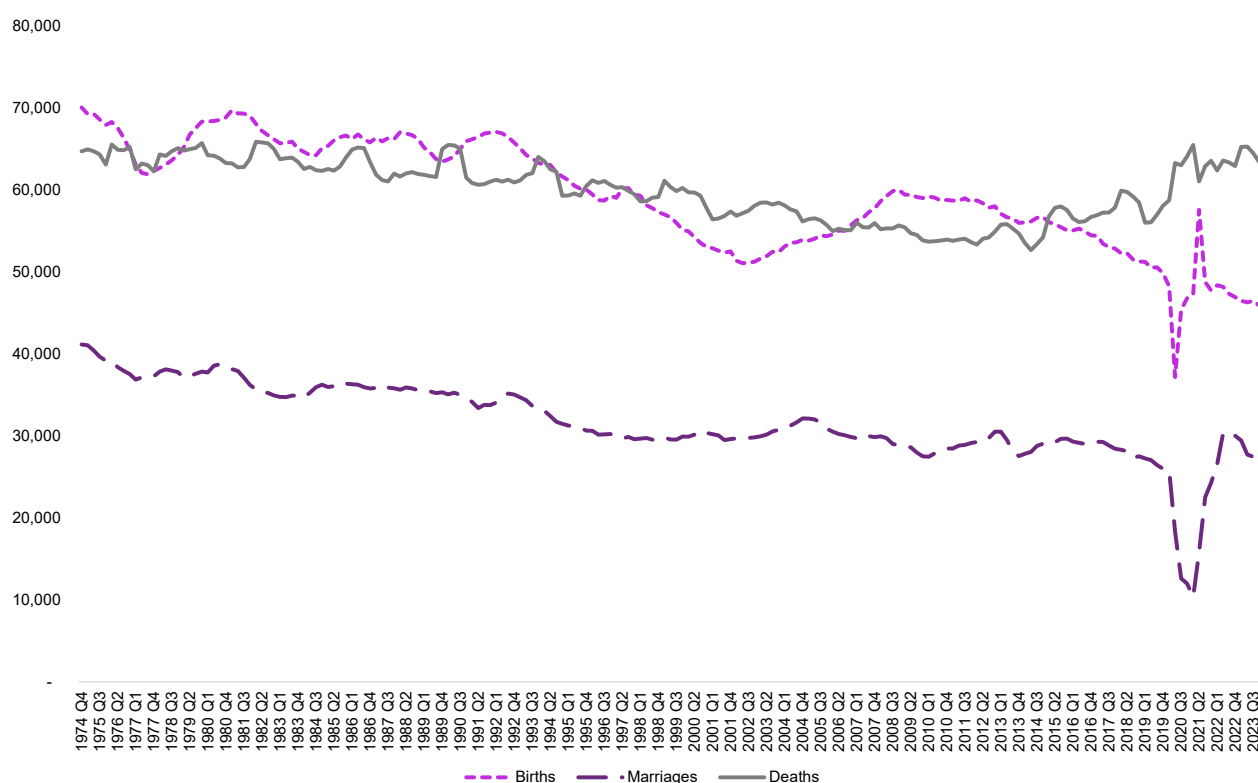
Since June 2021 mixed-sex couples have been able to form a civil partnership. Of the 183 civil partnerships registered in the fourth quarter of 2023, 146 involved mixed-sex couples.

5. Natural change (births minus deaths)

For the latest four quarter period (2023 Q1 to 2023 Q4) there were 45,932 births and 63,394 deaths, a shortfall of 17,462 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 2, 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 2: 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.

6. 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 2023 are provisional and likely to be finalised in summer 2024.

Information about 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](#)
- [background information on points which are specific to statistics about deaths.](#)

Finalised Vital Events statistics for calendar years as a whole can be found in the [Vital Events Reference Tables](#).

7. 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

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