

Population and families

State of Children in Suffolk

Autumn 2024



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Contents

Population and families.....	0
Note	2
Summary	2
Numbers of children and young people.....	2
Population distribution.....	4
Children aged 0 to 4	4
Children aged 5 to 19	5
Young people aged 20 to 25.....	6
Population projections	7
Lower tier local authorities	8
Ethnicity	9
Language	9
School pupils.....	11
Births	12
Births to non-UK born mothers	13
Deprivation and poverty	14
Families.....	16

Note

This is an update of a report first published in 2022. Content has been moved.

- Asylum-seekers and refugees - now in the chapter Children and young people who may need extra support
- Gypsy, Roma and Travellers - now in the chapter Community
- Sexual identity - now in the chapter Community

Summary

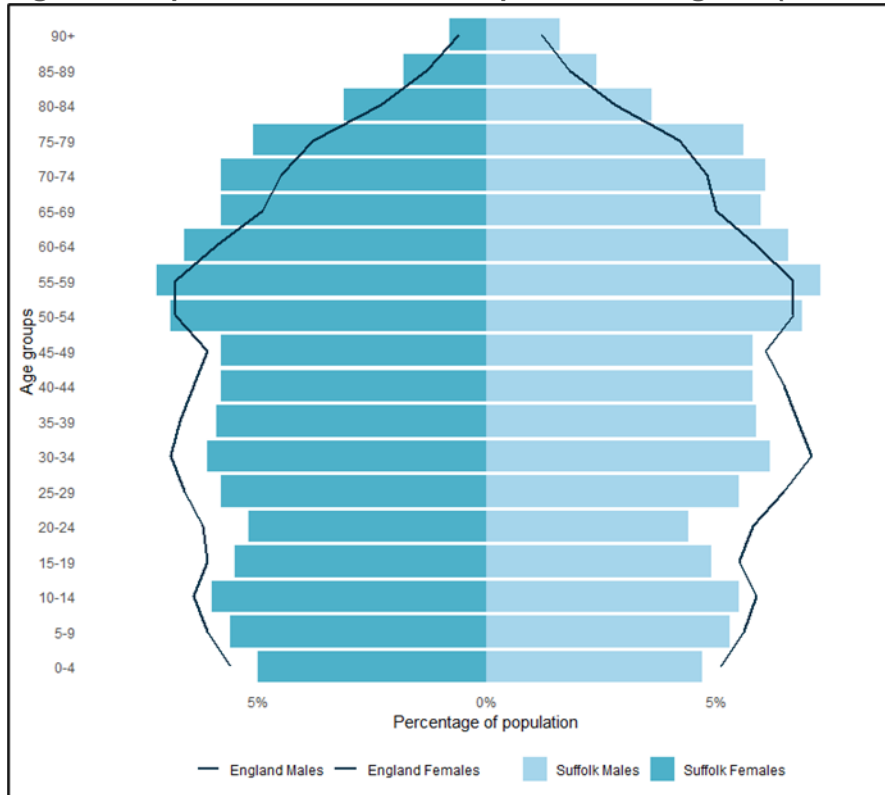
Understanding how many children and young people live in Suffolk is vital when it comes to planning and providing services such as care for newborn babies, nursery places, education, apprenticeships, housing, and transport. Similarly, the health and wellbeing needs of local children and young people cannot be fully met or measured without first knowing how many there are, where they live, how many may need extra support, and how many there may be in the coming years. Information about the population of children and young people in Suffolk should be used to help improve access to services, as well as helping reduce differences in health outcomes between those who have the best and poorest health.

With a total population of 768,555 as of mid-2022, Suffolk has a lower proportion of children and young people aged 0-24 (26.0%) compared to the national average of 29.1%. Projections indicate a 1.9% decrease in this age group by 2043, despite an overall population growth of 6.5%. The county's demographic profile shows less ethnic diversity among children and young people compared to England, with less than 1 in 5 (17.1%) from non-White British backgrounds compared to 1 in 3 (32.9%) nationally. This diversity varies significantly across the county, with Ipswich having the highest proportion (32.6%) of young people from ethnic minority groups.

Numbers of children and young people

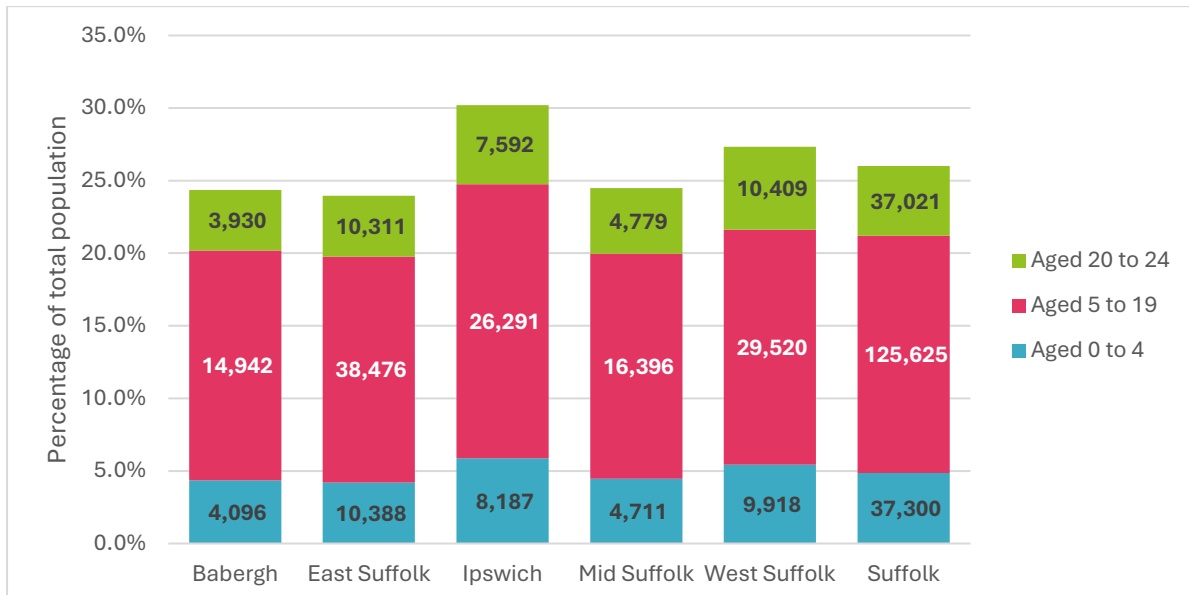
The population of Suffolk was estimated to be 768,555 in mid-2022. Children and young people aged 0-24 made up 26.0% of the Suffolk population, compared to 29.1% in England. Suffolk's population profile had a lower proportion of children and young people for each age group compared to the England average (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Population of Suffolk compared with England (mid-2022)



Source: Office for National Statistics (2023) [Estimates of the population for England and Wales: Mid-2022](#)

Figure 2: Suffolk population aged 0-24 by local authority and age band, mid-year estimates 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics (2023) [Estimates of the population for England and Wales: Mid-2022](#)

- Babergh 0 - 24 year olds: 122,968, 24.4% of the total Babergh population
- East Suffolk 0 - 24 year olds: 59,175, 23.9% of the total East Suffolk population
- Ipswich 0 - 24 year olds: 42,070, 30.2% of the total Ipswich population
- Mid Suffolk 0 - 24 year olds: 25,886, 24.5% of the total Mid Suffolk population
- West Suffolk 0 - 24 year olds: 49,847, 27.3% of the total West Suffolk population
- Suffolk 0 - 24 year olds: 199,946, 26.0% of the total Suffolk population

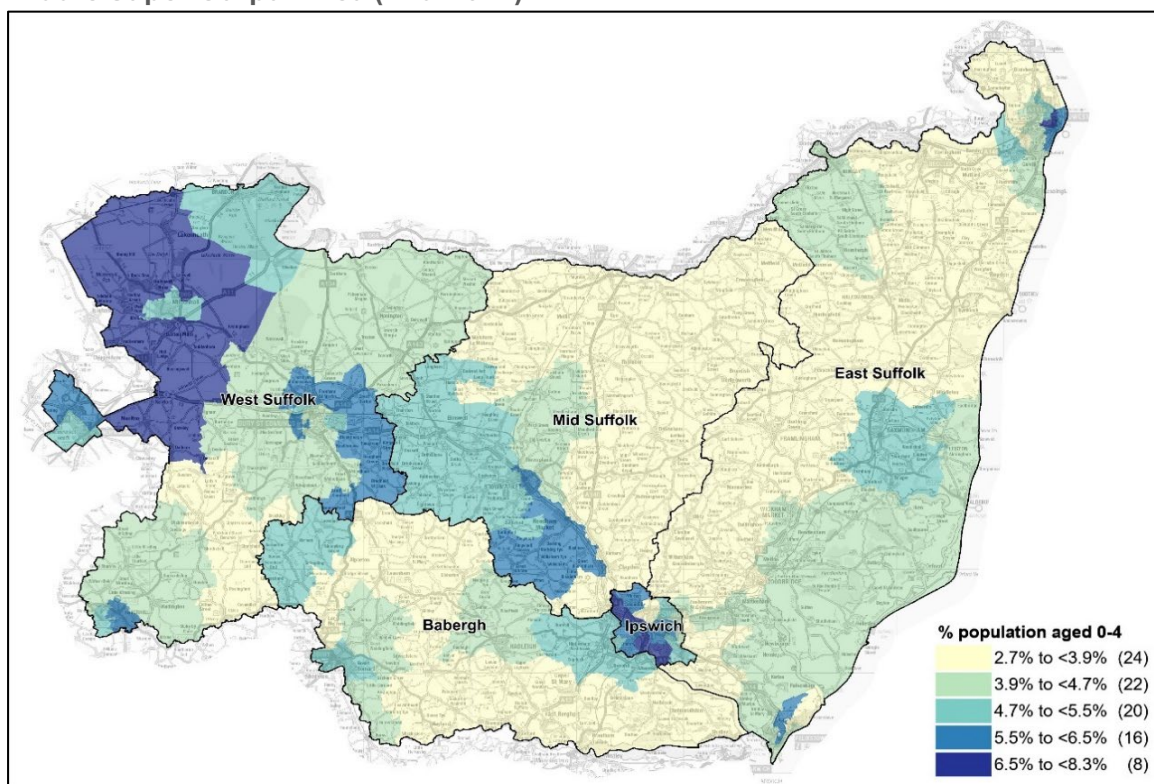
Population distribution

Children aged 0 to 4

The mid-2022 population estimates indicated that there were 37,273 children aged 0 to 4 living in Suffolk, which was approximately 4.8% of the total population ([Office for National Statistics 2024](#)).

Figure 3 provides a detailed picture of where higher proportions of children aged 0 to 4 live in Suffolk. Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs) with higher proportions of 0-4 year old children are highlighted in darker shades.

Figure 3: Estimated percentage of Suffolk's population aged 0 to 4 years old by Middle Super Output Area (mid-2022)



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Source: Office for National Statistics (2024); [Middle layer Super Output Area population estimates](#)

The MSOA for Beck Row, Eriswell & Barton Mills (West Suffolk 003 in West Suffolk) has the highest proportion of 0 to 4 year olds in Suffolk at 8.3% of the total MSOA population. An additional 5 MSOA areas within Suffolk have 7.0% or higher of their total MSOA population aged between 0 to 4 years old, including Red Lodge, Icklingham and Moulton (7.8%) and Lakenheath (7.1%) in West Suffolk, Lowestoft Central (7.1%) in East Suffolk, and Gainsborough, Greenwich & Orwell (7.0%) and Westgate (7.0%) in Ipswich. These population estimates use the census definition of people who are “usually resident” in the UK for 12 months, excluding short-term migrants – meaning US Visiting Forces (USVF) families in West Suffolk (based at RAF Mildenhall and Lakenheath) living in the UK for 12 months or longer would be included within the population estimates ([Office for National Statistics 2021](#)).

The 0-4 population of Suffolk's districts and boroughs is as follows:

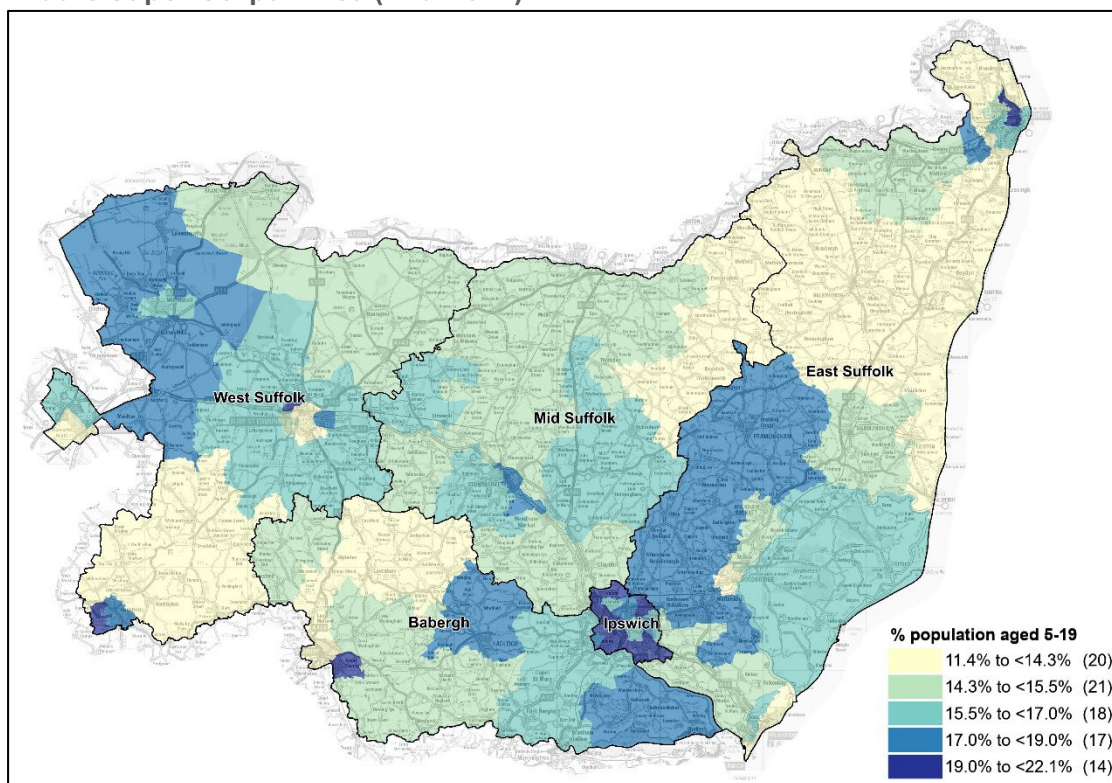
- Ipswich: 5.9%
- East Suffolk: 5.2%
- West Suffolk: 4.8%
- Mid Suffolk: 4.5%
- Babergh: 4.3%

Children aged 5 to 19

The mid-2022 population estimates indicated that there were 125,612 children and young people aged 5 to 19 living in Suffolk, which was approximately 16.3% of the total population ([Office for National Statistics](#) 2024).

Figure 4 provides a detailed picture of where higher proportions of young people aged 5 to 19 live in Suffolk. Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs) with higher proportions of 5-19 year old young people are highlighted in darker shades.

Figure 4: Estimated percentage of Suffolk's population aged 5 to 19 years old by Middle Super Output Area (mid-2022)



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Source: Office for National Statistics (2024); [Middle layer Super Output Area population estimates](#)

Three MSOAs within Ipswich have over 20.0% of their total MSOA population aged between 5 to 19: Priory Heath (22.0%), Rushmere (21.8%) and Gainsborough, Greenwich & Orwell (21.7%). East Suffolk also has two MSOAs with over 20% of their total MSOA population aged between 5 to 19: Gunton West (21.3%) and Lowestoft Central (20.3%). West Suffolk also has two MSOAs with over 20% of their total population aged between 5 to 19: Howard Estate & Northgate (20.2%) and Haverhill West (20.0%).

The 5-19 population of Suffolk's districts and boroughs is as follows:

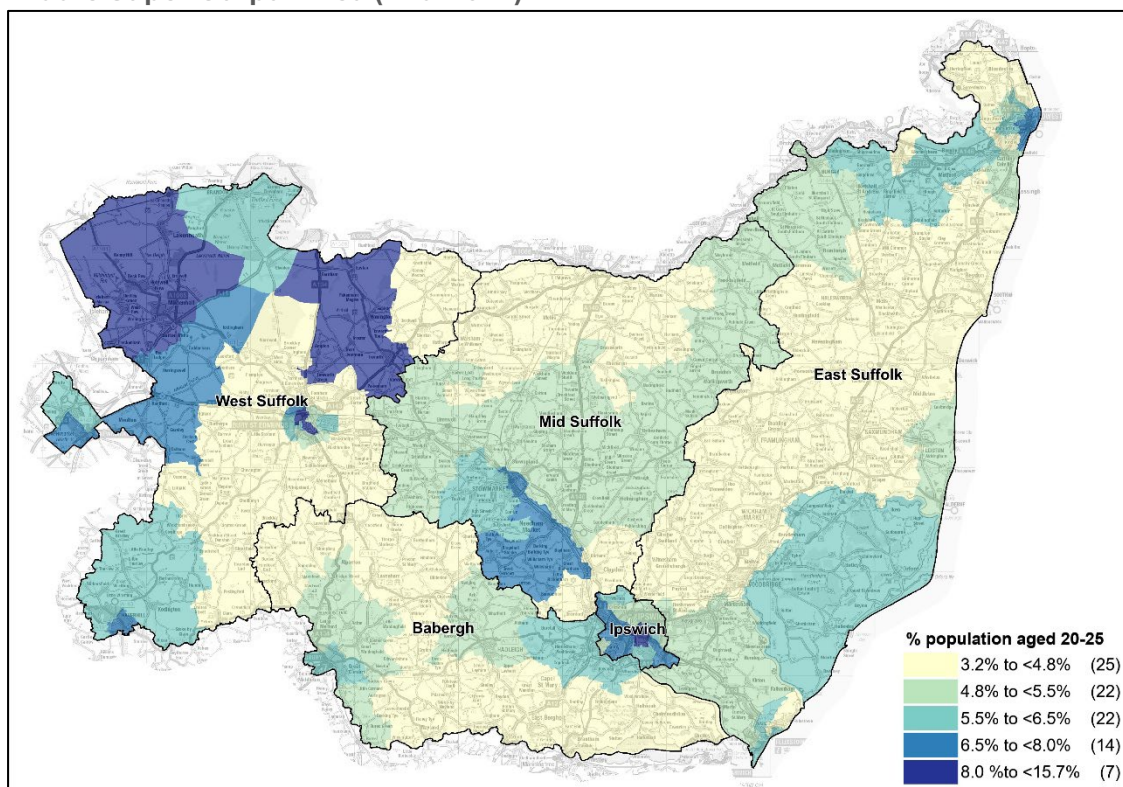
- Ipswich: 18.9%
- East Suffolk: 17.5%
- Babergh: 15.9%
- Mid Suffolk: 15.5%
- West Suffolk: 15.5%

Young people aged 20 to 25

The mid-2022 population estimates indicated that there were 45,497 young adults aged 20 to 25 living in Suffolk, which was approximately 5.9% of the total population ([Office for National Statistics 2024](#)).

Figure 5 provides a detailed picture of where higher proportions of young adults aged 20 to 25 live in Suffolk. Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs) with higher proportions of 20 to 25 year olds are highlighted in darker shades.

Figure 5: Estimated percentage of Suffolk's population aged 20 to 25 years old by Middle Super Output Area (mid-2022)



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Source: Office for National Statistics (2024); [Middle layer Super Output Area population estimates](#)

Three MSA areas in Suffolk have greater than 10.0% of their total MSA population aged between 20 to 25 years of age. These MSA areas are Lakenheath (15.6%) and Beck Row, Eriswell & Barton Mills (11.0%) in West Suffolk, and Ipswich Central (10.2%) in Ipswich. The higher proportion of 20 to 25 year olds in Lakenheath/Mildenhall and surrounding areas of West Suffolk can be partly explained by the US Visiting Forces (USVF) population and their families.

The 20-25 population of Suffolk's districts and boroughs is as follows:

- Ipswich: 6.7%

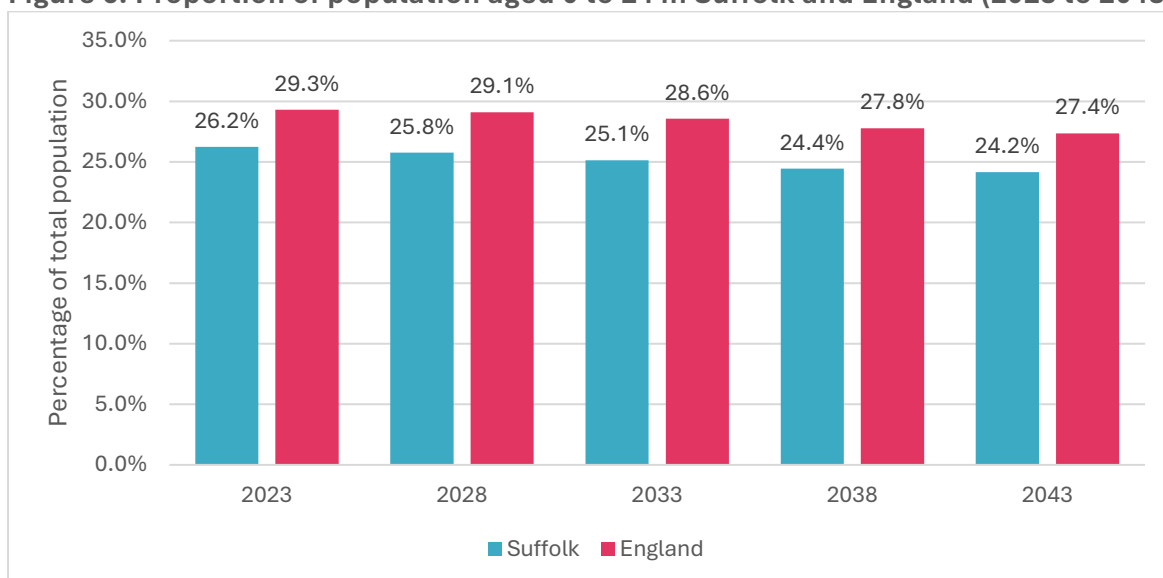
- West Suffolk: 6.2%
- East Suffolk: 6.0%
- Mid Suffolk: 5.6%
- Babergh: 5.2%

Population projections

Suffolk is expected to continue to have a lower proportion of children compared to the England average throughout the period between 2023 to 2043 (Figure 6).

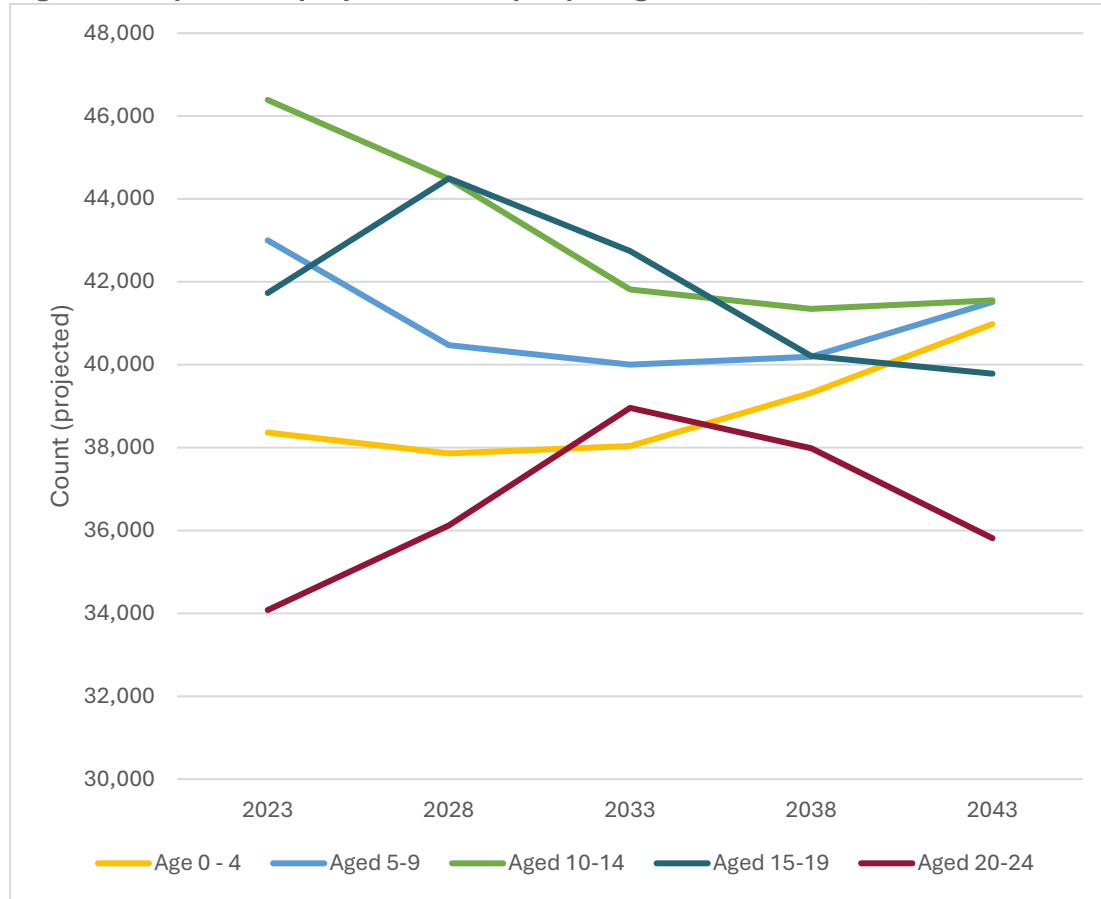
While Suffolk's population is expected to grow over the next 20 years, population projections show that there will be a decrease in the number and the proportion of 0-24 year olds between 2023 to 2043 (Figure 6). The proportion of 0-24 year olds in Suffolk is expected to decrease by 1.9% from 26.2% (2023) to 24.2% in 2043. This is despite an estimated 6.5% increase in the total Suffolk population between 2023 (776,148) and 2043 (826,480).

Figure 6: Proportion of population aged 0 to 24 in Suffolk and England (2023 to 2043)



Source: Office for National Statistics (2020); [Population projections for local authorities](#)

Figure 7 shows how numbers are projected to change for children and young people in 5-year age bands between 2023 to 2043. The data shows the number of 10-14 year olds is expected to decline over the next 20 years, and numbers of 0-4 year olds will increase; numbers of 15 to 19 year olds are projected to increase between 2023 to 2028 before declining until 2043.

Figure 7: Population projections for people aged 0 to 24 in Suffolk, 2023-2043

Note: Vertical axis does not start at 0

Source: Office for National Statistics (2020); [Population projections for local authorities](#)

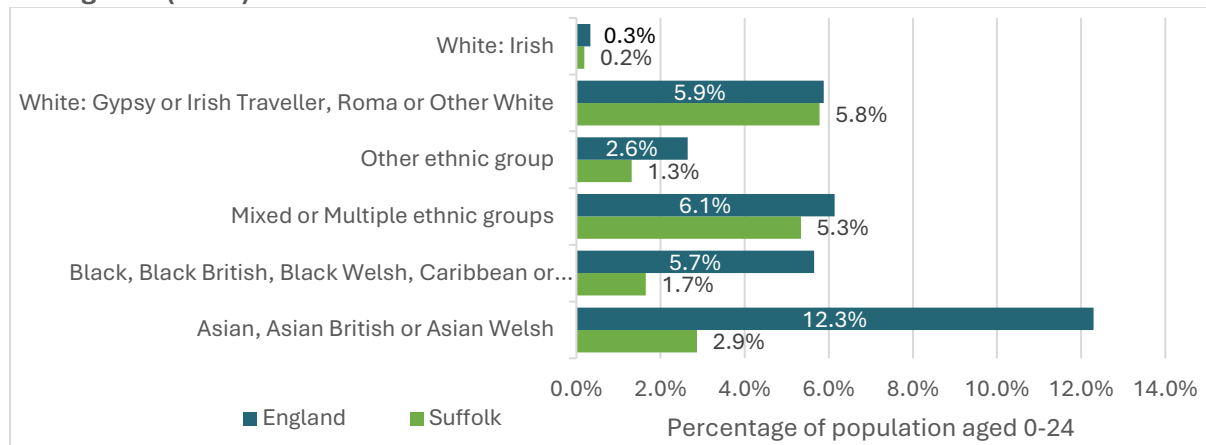
Lower tier local authorities

- Babergh:** The proportion of 0 - 24 year olds is projected to decline from 24.3% (22,862) of the total population in 2023 to 22.2% (22,589) by 2043 (an estimated decrease of 273 0 - 24 in children and young people aged 0 - 24)
- East Suffolk:** The proportion of 0 - 24 year olds is forecasted to fall from 24.3% (62,313) of the total population in 2023 to 21.8% (61,161) by 2043 (an expected decrease of 1,152 in children and young people aged 0 - 24)
- Ipswich:** The proportion of 0 - 24 year olds is expected to decrease from 29.9% (40,801) of the total population in 2023 to 28.0% (38,041) by 2043 (an expected decrease of 2,760 in children and young people aged 0 - 24)
- Mid Suffolk:** The proportion of 0 - 24 year olds is anticipated to drop from 23.8% (25,371) of the total population in 2023 to 21.2% (24,520) by 2043 (an expected decrease of 851 in children and young people aged 0 - 24)
- West Suffolk:** The proportion of 0 - 24 year olds is predicted to reduce from 28.6% (52,223) of the total population in 2023 to 27.7% (53,343) by 2043 (despite an expected increase of 1,120 in children and young people aged 0 - 24)

Ethnicity

Fewer than 1 in 5 (17.1%) of Suffolk's population aged 0-24 population are from a non-White British (or White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish) background (2021 Census), compared to almost 1 in 3 (32.9%) in England. The largest minority ethnic group was White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or Other White (5.8%, n=11,498). Figure 8 shows that Suffolk's 0-19 population is less ethnically diverse than England.

Figure 8: Proportion of the population aged 0-24 by ethnic group for Suffolk compared to England (2021)



Source: Office for National Statistics (2023); [Age, ethnic group and sex](#)

The ethnic minority population varies significantly across Suffolk, with Ipswich having a more ethnically diverse population - 32.6% of 0-24 year olds in Ipswich are classified as an ethnicity other than White British ([Office for National Statistics 2023](#)).

In the 2022/23 academic year, 22.0% of pupils who attended state-funded primary schools in Suffolk were from a minority ethnic group (any group other than White British), compared to 20.7% of state-funded secondary school pupils (Table 1). The largest minority ethnic groups within Suffolk schools were children from White – Any other White background (7.3% in state funded primary schools and 6.5% in state funded secondary schools).

Table 1: Pupils from minority ethnic groups in Suffolk state-funded schools (2022/23 academic year)

Area	Primary school pupils (count)	Primary school pupils (%)	Secondary school pupils (count)	Primary school pupils (%)
England	1,739,780	37.4%	1,358,423	37.4%
Suffolk	12,582	22.0%	9,431	20.7%

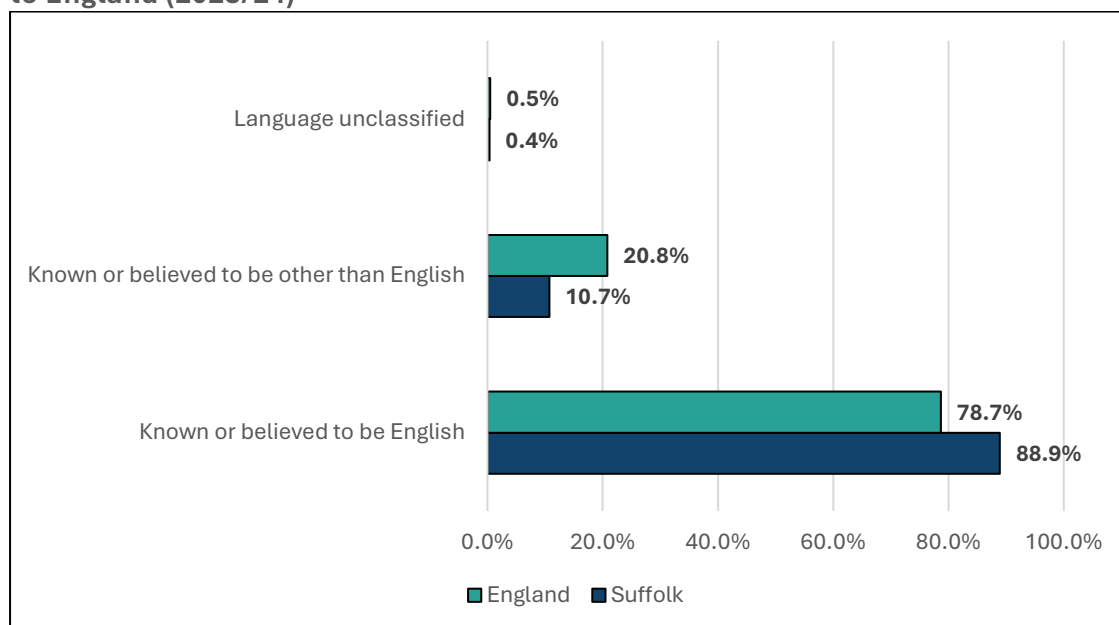
Source: Department for Education (2023); [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#)

Language

In 2023/24, almost 9 out of 10 (88.9%) Suffolk pupils were known or believed to have English as their first language, compared to fewer than 8 out of 10 (78.7%) across England (Figure 9). Just over 1 in 5 (20.8%) school-age children in England had a first language other than English, while in Suffolk, the rate was half the national figure (10.7%, or 1 in 10).

In Suffolk, there were 11,192 school-age children with a first language other than English and 365 children with an unclassified first language ([Department for Education 2024](#)).

Figure 9: Proportion of the school-age children by first language for Suffolk compared to England (2023/24)



Source: [Department for Education](#) (2024)

Looking at unpublished lower tier local authority level data, English is the primary language/mother tongue across all areas (Table 2), with the highest proportion in Mid Suffolk (96.8%) and the lowest in Ipswich (73.9%). The county-wide English-speaking percentage is 88.6%. There are 163 first languages spoken by Suffolk pupils.

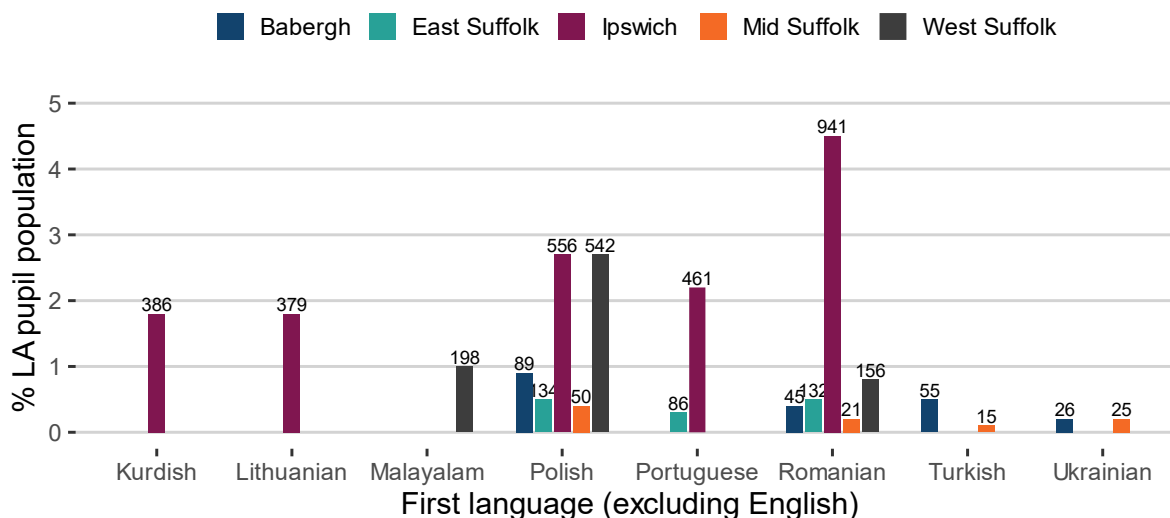
1. Ipswich: 131
2. West Suffolk: 95
3. East Suffolk: 92
4. Babergh: 67
5. Mid Suffolk: 54

Table 2: Pupils (Reception to Year 11) whose main language is English, by Suffolk local authority, 2024

Area	Count	% pupils
Suffolk	81,830	88.6%
Babergh	9,949	95.1%
East Suffolk	26,893	94.6%
Ipswich	15,480	73.9%
Mid Suffolk	11,875	96.8%
West Suffolk	17,633	86.8%

Source: Suffolk County Council – Children and Young People’s Services School Census data (2024)

The top five first languages spoken by Suffolk pupils (Reception to Year 11) by lower tier local authority are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Top five (named) first languages of Suffolk pupils (Reception - Year 11) by lower tier local authority

Note: labels show counts.

Source: Suffolk County Council – Children and Young People’s Services School Census data (2024)

After English, the most common languages spoken in Suffolk are:

- Polish (1.5%, n=1,371),
- Romanian (1.4%, n=1,295),
- Portuguese (0.8%, n=712),
- Lithuanian (0.6%, n=575),
- Myalamam (0.6%, n=573) - Malayalam is the official language of Kerala, and is one of the 22 scheduled languages of India.

Ipswich shows the most linguistic diversity, with larger populations speaking Romanian (4.7%), Polish (2.7%), and Portuguese (2.2%). As of July 2024, there were 89 school-aged children in Suffolk on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (Suffolk County Council 2024).

School pupils

The School Census also provides figures on the proportion of pupils in Suffolk schools who have a first language other than English. For the 2023/24 academic year, 11.4% of state-funded primary school pupils in Suffolk did not have English as a first language, in comparison to 8.4% of state-funded secondary school pupils.

Table 3: Pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English, Suffolk state-funded schools (2023/24 academic year)

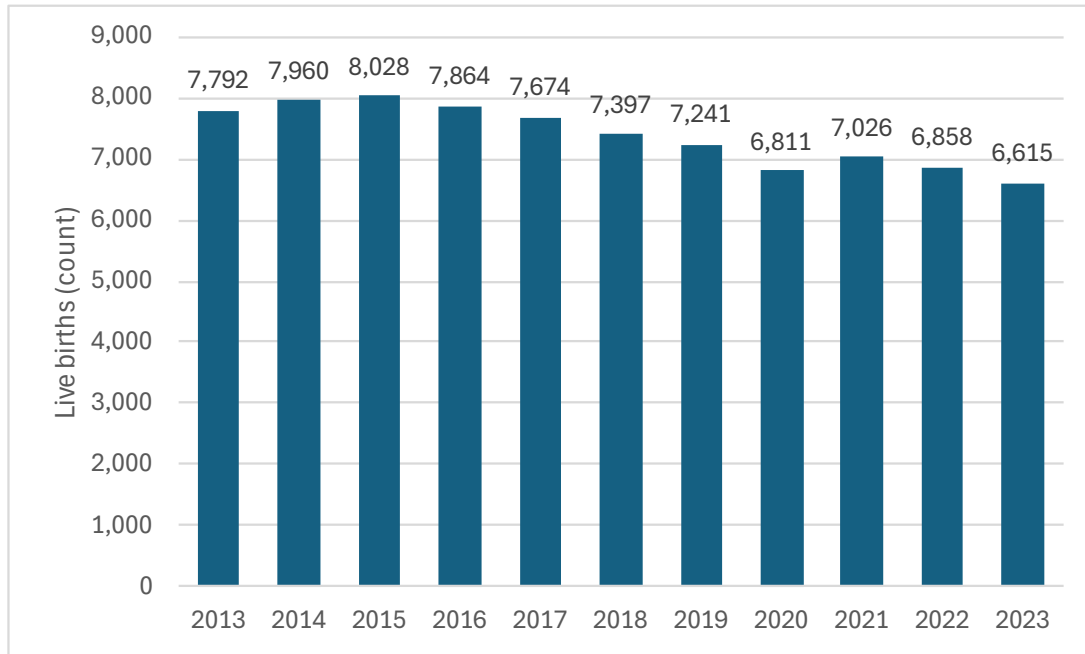
Area	Primary school pupils (count)	Primary school pupils (%)	Secondary school pupils (count)	Primary school pupils (%)
England	1,050,199	22.8%	684,422	18.1%
Suffolk	6,883	12.2%	4,167	9.1%

Source: Department for Education (2024); [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#)

Births

There were 6,615 live births in Suffolk in 2023, a fall of 3.5% from 2022 (compared with England: 2.3% fall). Locally, the number of live births is the lowest it has been over the past decade (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Number of live births in Suffolk (2013 to 2023)

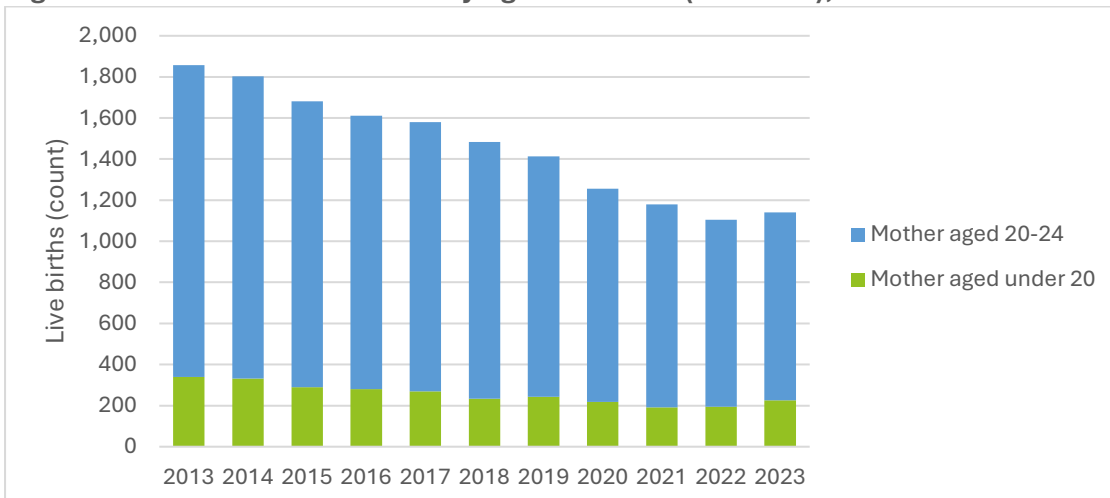


Source: [Office for National Statistics. Live births in England and Wales](#)

The number of live births to mothers aged under 25 years in Suffolk rose between 2022 and 2023, although it had been declining year on year since 2013 (Figure 12). In England, the number of live births to mothers aged under 2025 fell in 2023 (5.6% compared to 2022).

18.1% live births in Suffolk in 2023 were to mothers aged under 25, statistically significantly higher than England (14.4%).

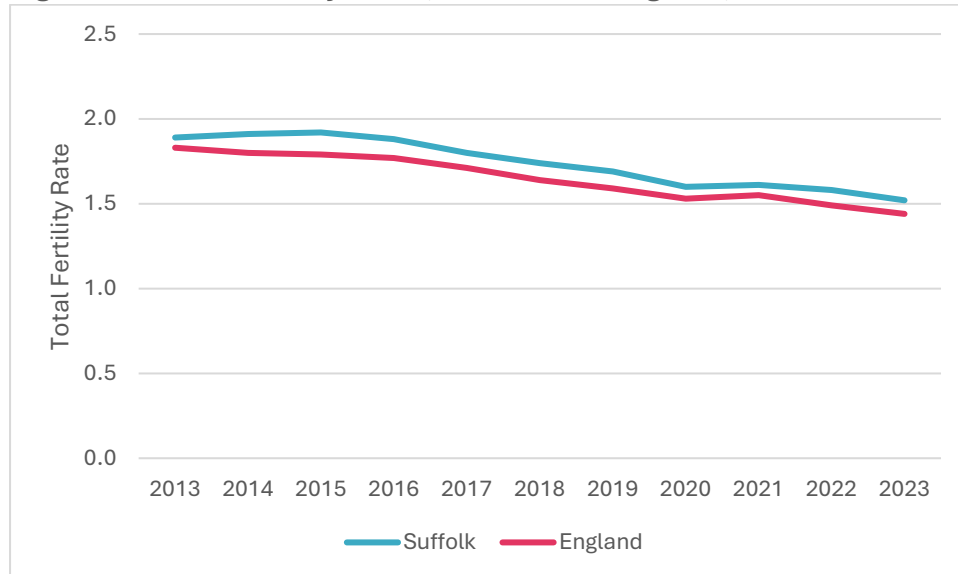
Figure 12: Live births in Suffolk by age of mother (under 25), 2013-2023



Source: Office for National Statistics. [Live births in England and Wales down to local authority area](#)

The total fertility rate in Suffolk continues to be higher than the England average, though rates for both Suffolk and England are falling (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Total Fertility Rate*, Suffolk and England, 2013 - 2023



* The Total Fertility Rate is the average number of live children that a group of women would bear if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates of the calendar year throughout their childbearing lifespan.

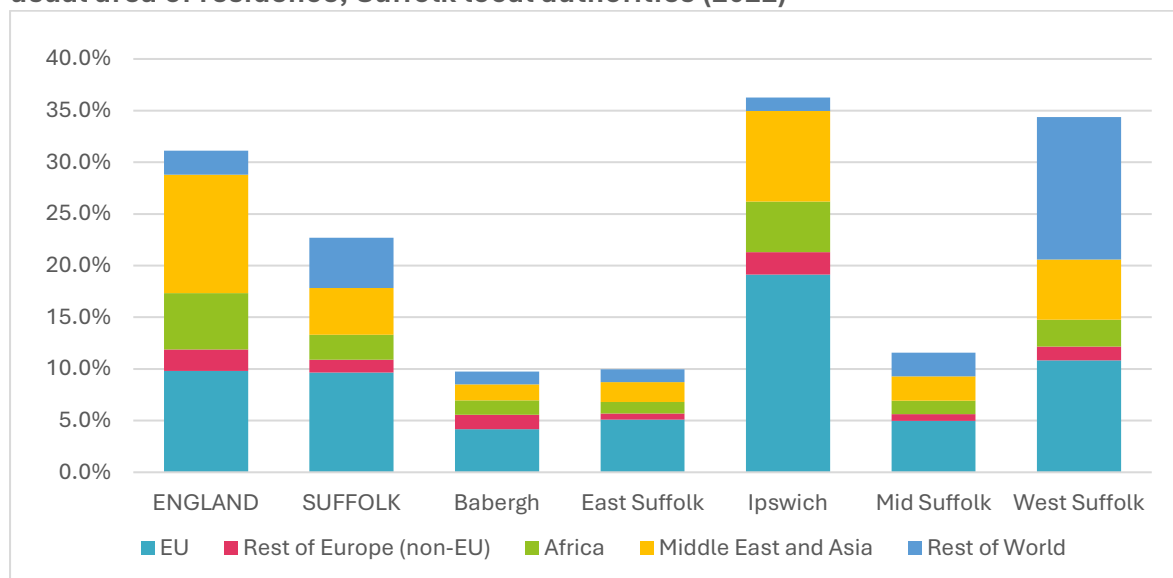
Source: [Office for National Statistics. Live births in England and Wales](#)

Births to non-UK born mothers

In 2022, just over 1 in 5 (26.9%) of which were to either one or both parents born outside of the UK. This figure is lower than the England average of 36.7% ([Parents' country of birth](#), Table 7a. Office for National Statistics, 2023). There is large variation across the county: 40.6% of Ipswich live births have either one or both parents born outside of the UK compared to 13.2% in Babergh.

Just under 1 in 5 live births (22.7%) in Suffolk in 2022 were to mothers born outside the UK (1,557 out of 6,885). This is below the England average of 31.1% (Figure 14). Within Suffolk, the highest proportions of births to mothers born outside the UK were in Ipswich (36.3%) and West Suffolk (34.4%). The higher proportions of births in Ipswich are likely to reflect the increased ethnic diversity within the borough. The presence of the United States military bases at RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall in West Suffolk are likely to drive these higher proportions, particularly live births to non-UK mothers from the 'rest of world.'

Figure 14: Percentage of babies born to mothers who were born outside the UK by usual area of residence, Suffolk local authorities (2022)



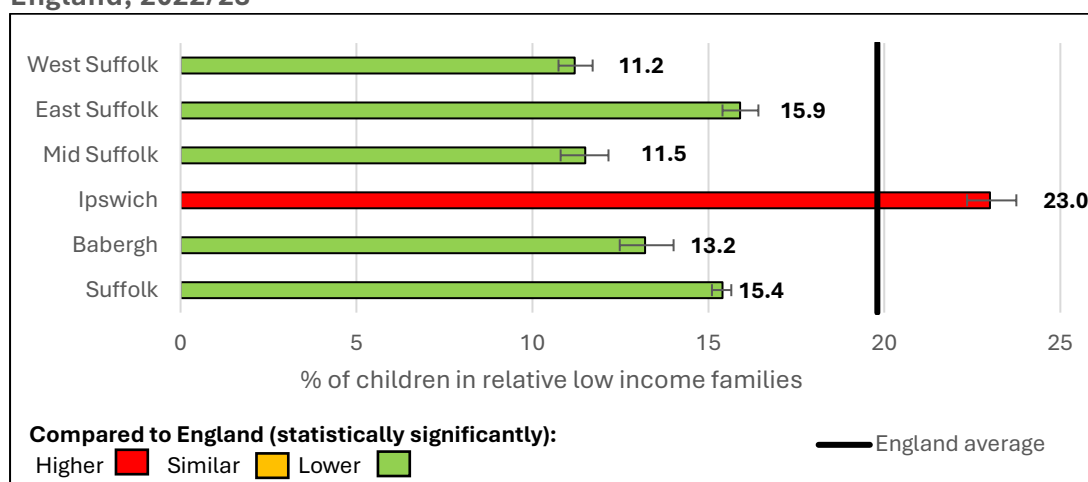
Office for National Statistics, [Parents' country of birth](#) (Table 7), 2023.

Deprivation and poverty

The [Tackling Poverty Strategy for Suffolk](#) (2022), notes that living in poverty negatively affects children's life chances and social, emotional, and cognitive development (particularly language function, attention, and decision-making), and academic achievement.

The latest data available for Suffolk as a county is using the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) indicator: [Children in relative low income families \(under 16s\)](#). Relative low income is defined as a family in low income before Housing Costs (BHC) in the reference year. Relative low income sets a threshold as 60 percent of the UK average (median) income and moves each year as average income changes. A family must have claimed one or more of Universal Credit, Tax Credits or Housing Benefit at any point in the year to be classed as low income in these statistics.

In 2022/23, 15.4% of children aged 0 to 15 in Suffolk were classified as living in relative low income families, which was approximately 20,218 children (Figure 15). Over 1 in 5 children in Ipswich were living in relative low income families in 2022/23.

Figure 15: Children in relative low income families (under 16s), Suffolk compared to England, 2022/23

Source: [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](#) – Children in relative low income families

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families and is available at lower geographies. This is a separate measure, which defines low income including both those people that are out-of-work, and those that are in work but who have low earnings. This is a more absolute low income definition based on means-testing.

Levels of deprivation varied significantly across Suffolk's local authorities and at smaller neighbourhood levels. Table 4 details the percentage of children affected by income deprivation across Suffolk's Lower-layer Super Output (LSOA) areas, ranging from 9.8% in Mid Suffolk, to 19.0% in Ipswich.

The table also includes the proportion of LSOAs in the most deprived 10% across England. None of West Suffolk's LSOAs fall into this category, but 11.8% of Ipswich's LSOAs are in the 10% highest nationally for income deprivation affecting children in 2019.

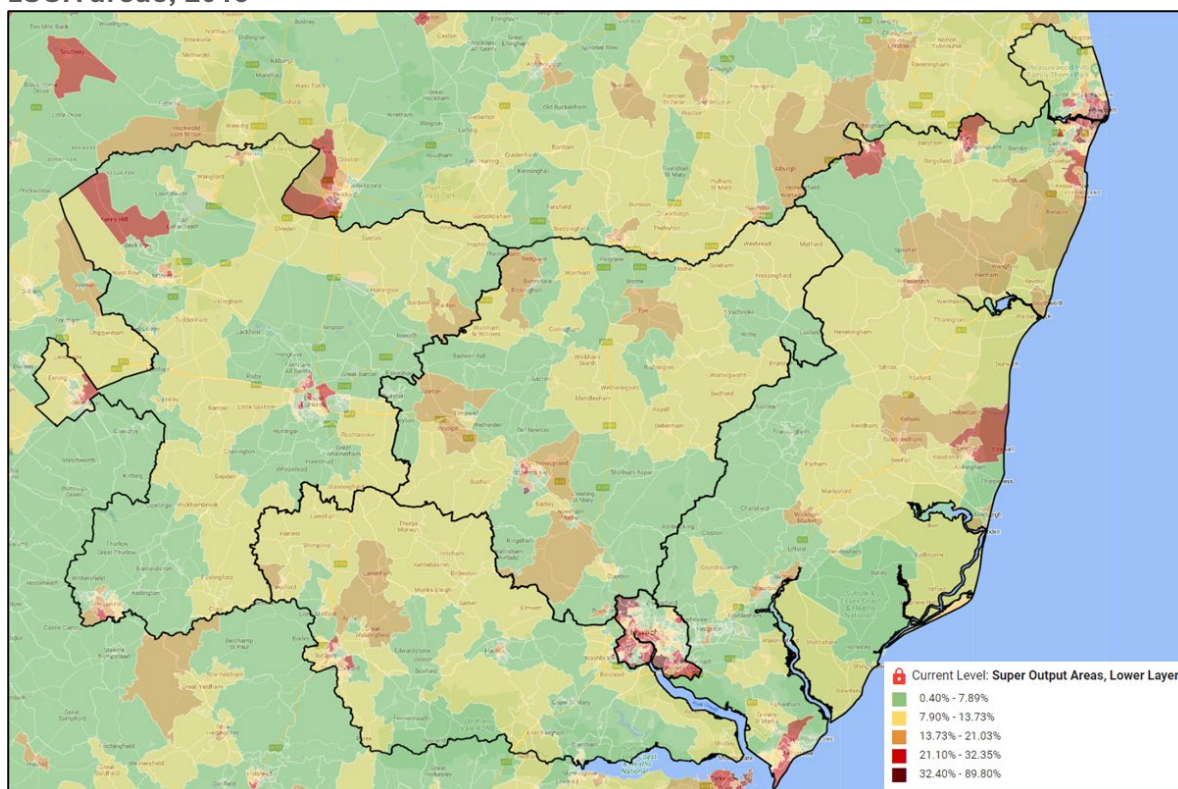
Table 4: Percentage of children affected by income deprivation and the proportion of LSOAs in the most deprived nationally by Suffolk district/borough, 2019

Area	Children affected by income deprivation (%)	Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in most deprived 10% nationally (%)
Babergh	10.9%	1.9%
East Suffolk	15.0%	6.9%
Ipswich	19.0%	11.8%
Mid Suffolk	9.8%	1.8%
West Suffolk	10.2%	0.0%

Source: [English Indices of Deprivation 2019: Summaries at Local Authority Level](#)

Figure 16 displays Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index data across Suffolk at Lower Super Output Area. LSOAs which have higher levels of child poverty include East Ipswich, Felixstowe, Lowestoft, and single MSOA areas of Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket.

Figure 16: Child poverty, Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) Suffolk LSOA areas, 2019



Source: [Local Insight – IoD 2019 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index \(IDACI\) Score \(rate\)](#)

Families

Family life in the UK is continually changing. Around 1 in 4 children under 15 no longer lives with both biological parents, cohabitation is increasing, and children are now leaving their parental homes far later ([Understanding society](#), 2021). In 2023, there were 3.2 million lone parent families in the UK, 16.3% of all families (Office for National Statistics, [Families and households in the UK](#), 2023).

Studies ([Kiernan et al, Families and inequalities, 2024](#); Caleyachetty et al, [Cumulative social risk exposure in childhood and smoking and excessive alcohol use in adulthood](#), 2016) suggest that the children of separated parents are at increased risk of:

- growing up in households with lower incomes and poorer housing,
- experiencing behavioural problems,
- performing less well in school and gaining fewer educational qualifications,
- leaving school and home when young,
- becoming sexually active, pregnant or a parent at an early age,
- reporting worse mental health and lower mental wellbeing into adulthood, and
- reporting higher levels of smoking, drinking and drug use during adolescence and adulthood.

There were around 19,500 lone parent households (approximately 8.3% of households) with an estimated 28,200 (17.5%) dependent children in Suffolk in 2023 – however, these estimates are potentially unreliable due to sample sizes (Table 5).

Table 5: Estimated numbers of lone parent households and children in Suffolk, 2023

Area	Households (count)	Households (%)	children under 16 (count)	children under 16 (%)	Dependent children (count)	Dependent children (%)
Suffolk	19,500	8.3	18,300	13.2	28,200	17.5
Babergh	3,400	12.5	3,300	19.0	3,900	18.4
East Suffolk	5,600	7.6	8,800	19.0	10,400	20.8
West Suffolk	6,300	11.0	3,000	10.5	9,600	26.8
England	1,624,300	9.1	2,346,700	21.6	2,781,000	22.3

These estimates are potentially unreliable due to small sample sizes.

Figures are not available for Ipswich and Mid Suffolk as samples or estimates are too small.

A dependent child is one aged 16 years or under, or aged 16 to 18 years and in full-time education.

Source: Office for National Statistics. NOMIS – [Annual Population Survey: lone parent households](#), 2023.