



Human  
Fertilisation &  
Embryology  
Authority

# Trends in egg and sperm donation

# Introduction

We are the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), the UK's independent regulator of fertility treatment. We are responsible for licensing and inspecting UK fertility clinics and setting the standards they must meet.


We collect data from fertility clinics on the treatments they carry out. This allows us to monitor trends in the sector to make improvements and publish useful information for patients, the sector and the wider public.

This report provides key information about the number and type of people newly registering as sperm and egg donors in the UK. It also gives information on trends in using donated sperm and eggs in fertility treatment, including how many treatments have been carried out and the demographics of patients.

This report complements our flagship annual publication, [Fertility treatment: trends and figures](#), which provides key information about the number and type of fertility treatments that have been carried out across the UK and how many of these have led to a birth.

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## Headlines from this report

- The number of newly-registered egg donors remains stable at around 1,600 a year. However, there has been a decrease in patients donating as part of an egg sharing arrangement.
  - The number of newly-registered sperm donors has increased following a dip between 2014 and 2015.
  - The proportion of egg donors with non-UK addresses (imports) remains small but the proportion of sperm donors who are non-UK residents continues to increase, making up 39% of all newly-registered donors in 2016.
  - Of sperm donors registered in non-UK countries, the most common countries are the US (49%) and Denmark (45%).
  - Fertility treatment using donor eggs and sperm is on the increase (both IVF and donor insemination), but represents less than 20% of treatment cycles in 2016.
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# Egg donors

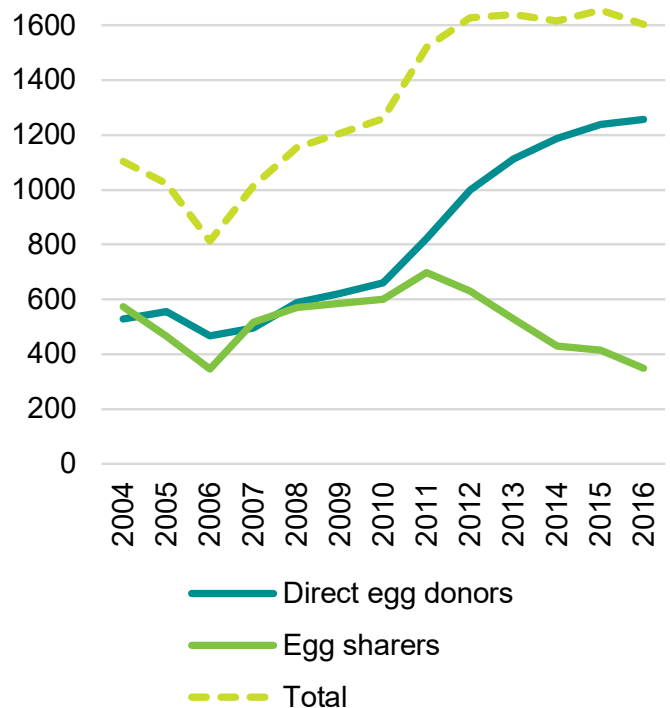
The number of egg donors newly registering at UK clinics has remained relatively stable between 2012-2016 at around 1,600 every year.

Most of these are categorised as 'direct egg donors', meaning that they are women who are donating their eggs but not undergoing any fertility treatment themselves.

The other classification is for women who donate as part of an egg sharing arrangement. An egg sharing arrangement is when a woman who is undergoing IVF donates a proportion of her eggs to another patient in exchange for discounted treatment services.

In 2016, 22% of newly-registered egg donors were egg sharers, and 78% were direct egg donors. Over the last few years, there has been a decrease in the number of egg sharers, falling from the peak of 698 in 2011 to 348 in 2016.

**Figure 1: Number of newly-registered egg donors**



## Location

For newly-registered UK egg donors, 42% were in London, with the next highest region being the North West with 16%. Only 7% of newly-registered egg donors were in Scotland, 5% in Wales and 1% in Northern Ireland.

The number of newly-registered egg donors with non-UK addresses (imports) remains low at 61 in 2016. Of these, 26 were donors from the Ukraine, with the next highest being the US with five.

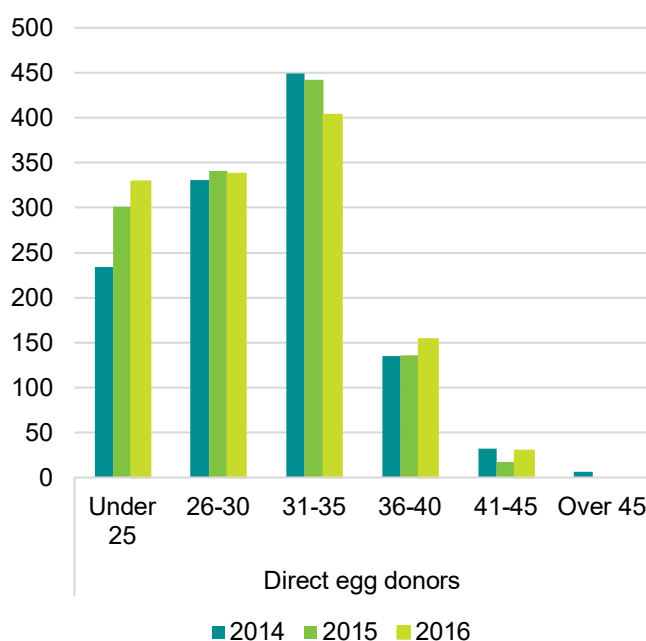
There have been small fluctuations in the last few years, but overall a very small proportion of newly-registered donors are non-UK.

## Age

Most women donating eggs are between 31-35 years old. Very few women over 40 donate eggs due to age restrictions placed on donation set out in professional body guidelines, as older women are less likely to have lots of high quality eggs.

Over the last few years, there has been an increase in the proportion of younger women becoming egg donors, with 26% under 25 in 2016, compared to 20% in 2014.

**Figure 2: Newly-registered egg donors by age (2016)**



## Ethnicity

In 2016, the ethnicity of egg donors was mostly white British (70%) followed by any other white background (14%).

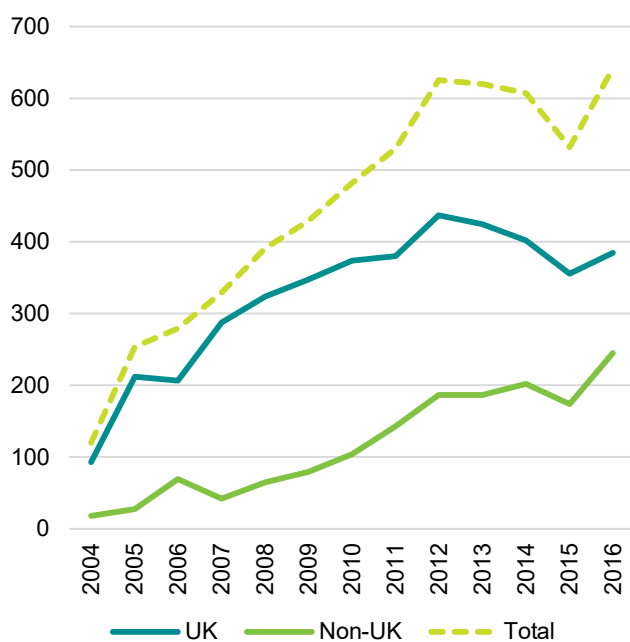
Other ethnicities which made up more than 1% were other white European (3%), Indian (2%), any other mixed background (2%), and black African (2%).

# Sperm donors

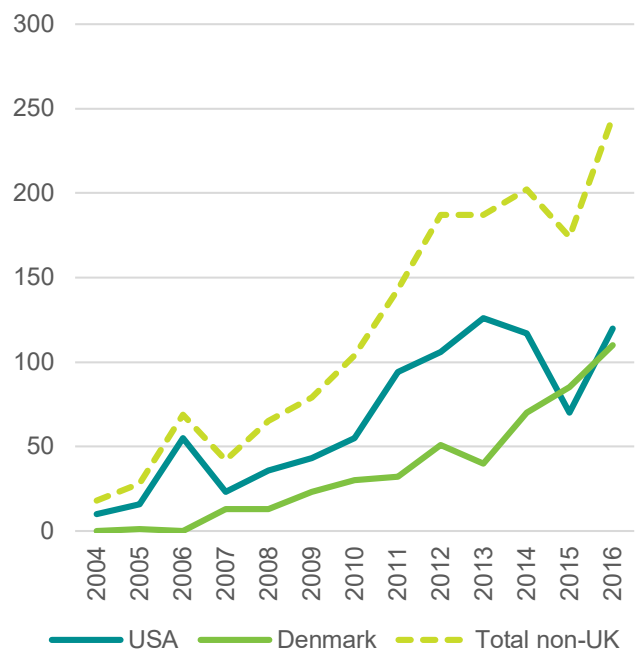
There are fewer sperm donors than egg donors registering each year. In 2016, there were 642 newly-registered sperm donors, which demonstrates a return to the steady levels seen before a dip in 2015 (+20.7%).

## Location

**Figure 3: Newly-registered sperm donors**



**Figure 4: Sperm donors by non-UK country**



Unlike egg donors, a sizeable proportion of sperm donors are registered outside the UK, and this is increasing. In 2016, 39% of newly-registered sperm donors were from outside of the UK, compared to 27% five years ago.

The most common country for importing sperm is the US, which made up 49% of newly-registered international donors in 2016. Denmark is the second most common country from which sperm are imported, with 45%, and around 6% are from a mix of other countries.

For UK donors, the highest concentration of newly-registered donors was in London (33%). The next most common regions were the South East (12%) and North West (12%). The areas with the lowest levels of newly-registered sperm donors were in the North East (3%) and South West (3%).

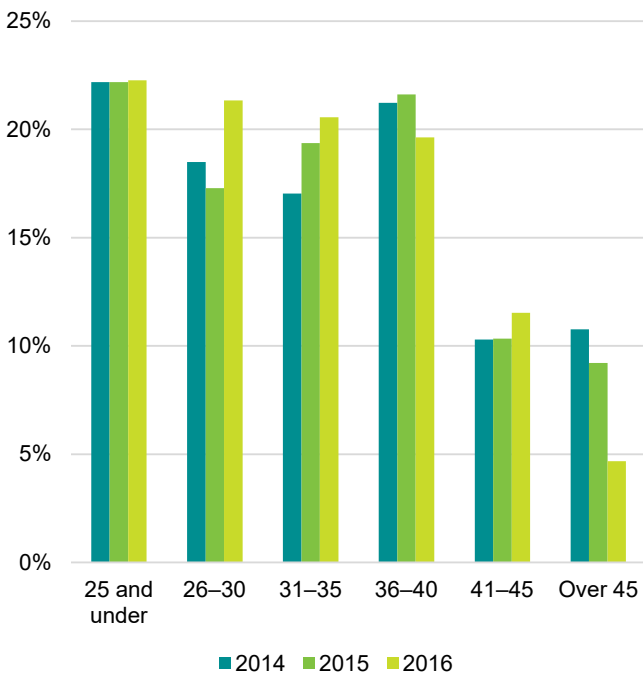
## Age

The number of sperm donors registering across age groups is quite consistent, until the age of 40 when this drops to a much lower proportion.

The trends in the age of donors shows that there has been minimal fluctuation, other than for donors over 45 where there has been a downward trend since 2014.

Compared to egg donors, sperm donors are more evenly distributed across all age groups with a higher proportion of both younger and older donors.

**Figure 5: Age of newly-registered sperm donors**



## Ethnicity

The ethnicity of UK sperm donors in 2016 is similar to egg donors, with 71% being white British.

The next most common ethnicities were any other white background (12%), black African (2%), Indian (2%), Chinese (2%) and white Irish (2%).

# Treatment numbers

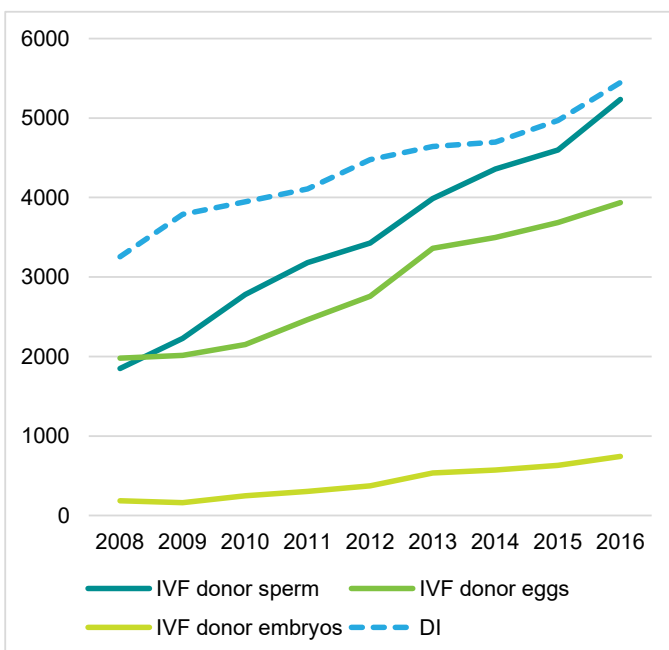
## IVF and donor insemination

IVF treatment cycles using donor eggs and sperm are increasing yearly, although they still make up a small proportion of cycles overall.

There are slightly more treatment cycles with donor sperm than eggs, but both are following similar upwards trajectories.

Donor insemination (DI) cycles are also on an upwards trend following the decline from 2004-2007, with 5,446 donor insemination treatment cycles in 2016.

**Figure 6: Treatment cycles with donor gametes**



## Funding

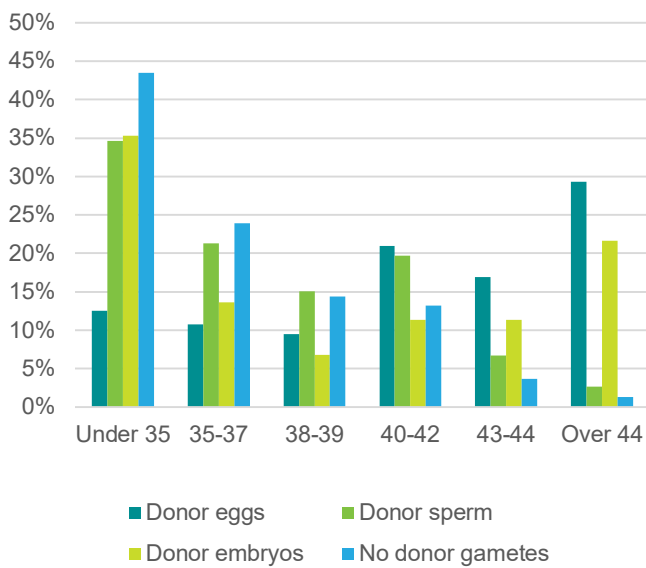
The number of NHS-funded IVF and DI cycles remains stable but due to the increasing numbers of cycles funded privately, the proportion of funding has shifted. In 2016, 57% of IVF cycles were privately funded and 43% funded by the NHS. For DI, only 27% of cycles were NHS-funded in 2016.

## Age

When looking at the age of patients using donor sperm and eggs, the demographics are very different across different donation types.

Patients using donor eggs are more likely to be older, which is likely to be due to age-related infertility that affects women's eggs. Patients using donor sperm tend to be younger, with 56% under 38, compared with only 24% for egg donors.

**Figure 7: Proportion of IVF cycles by age and gametes used (2016)**



## Partner status

The partner status of patients using donor sperm and eggs in treatment also varies depending on the treatment type.

For donor insemination, there is a roughly equal split between patients who have a female partner (41%) and those who have a male partner (42%), with a smaller proportion registering with no partner (17%).

Patients using donor eggs were mainly registered with a male partner (78%) in 2016. Treatment using donor sperm has a lower proportion of patients registered with a male partner (41%), with 28% registered with a female partner, and 20% registered with no partner.



# Background information

Clinics in the UK are required by law to provide information to us about all licensed fertility treatments they carry out.

We hold this information on a secure database called the Register, which contains information about fertility patients, the treatment they received and the outcomes. Results are published according to the year in which the cycle was started.

The information that we publish is a snapshot of data provided to us by licensed clinics at a particular time. The figures supplied in this report are from our data warehouse containing Register data as at 11/07/2018.

As clinics may submit data at any time, the figures published here may differ slightly to those published before or in the future.

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## Contact us regarding this publication

Media: [press.office@hfea.gov.uk](mailto:press.office@hfea.gov.uk)

General: [enquiristeam@hfea.gov.uk](mailto:enquiristeam@hfea.gov.uk)



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10 Spring Gardens  
London  
SW1A 2BU

T 020 7291 8200

E [enquiriesteam@hfea.gov.uk](mailto:enquiriesteam@hfea.gov.uk)

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