

Statistical bulletin

Civil Partnerships in the UK: 2011

Formations and dissolutions of civil partnerships analysed by the sex, age, and previous marital status of the couples and the place of registration.



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Release date:
31 July 2012

Next release:
8 October 2013

Table of contents

1. [Key findings](#)
2. [Summary](#)
3. [Number of civil partnership formations](#)
4. [Civil partnerships by sex](#)
5. [Civil partnerships by age](#)
6. [Civil partnerships by area of formation](#)
7. [Civil partnerships by previous partnership status](#)
8. [Number of dissolutions](#)
9. [Dissolutions by age, sex, and previous partnership status](#)
10. [Users of civil partnership statistics](#)
11. [References](#)
12. [Further information](#)
13. [Background notes](#)

1. Key findings

- The provisional number of civil partnerships in the UK in 2011 was 6,795, an increase of 6.4 per cent since 2010
- The mean age of men forming a civil partnership in the UK in 2011 was 40.1 years, while for women the average age was 38.3 years. These figures represent a small decrease in mean ages in comparison with 2010
- The provisional number of civil partnership dissolutions granted in the UK in 2011 was 672, an increase of 28.7 per cent since 2010.

2. Summary

This bulletin presents annual statistics on civil partnerships that were formed in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2011, as well as those which were dissolved.

Civil partnerships are a legal recognition of a relationship between two people of the same sex. A dissolution is a legal end to a civil partnership obtained through the courts.

Civil partnership statistics are analysed by sex, age, previous marital status and area of occurrence. Figures on formations for Northern Ireland, Scotland and the UK are provisional and all dissolution data are provisional.

The civil partnership formation statistics are derived from information recorded when civil partnerships are registered as part of civil registration, as required by law. Civil partnership dissolution statistics have been compiled from court records and include annulments.

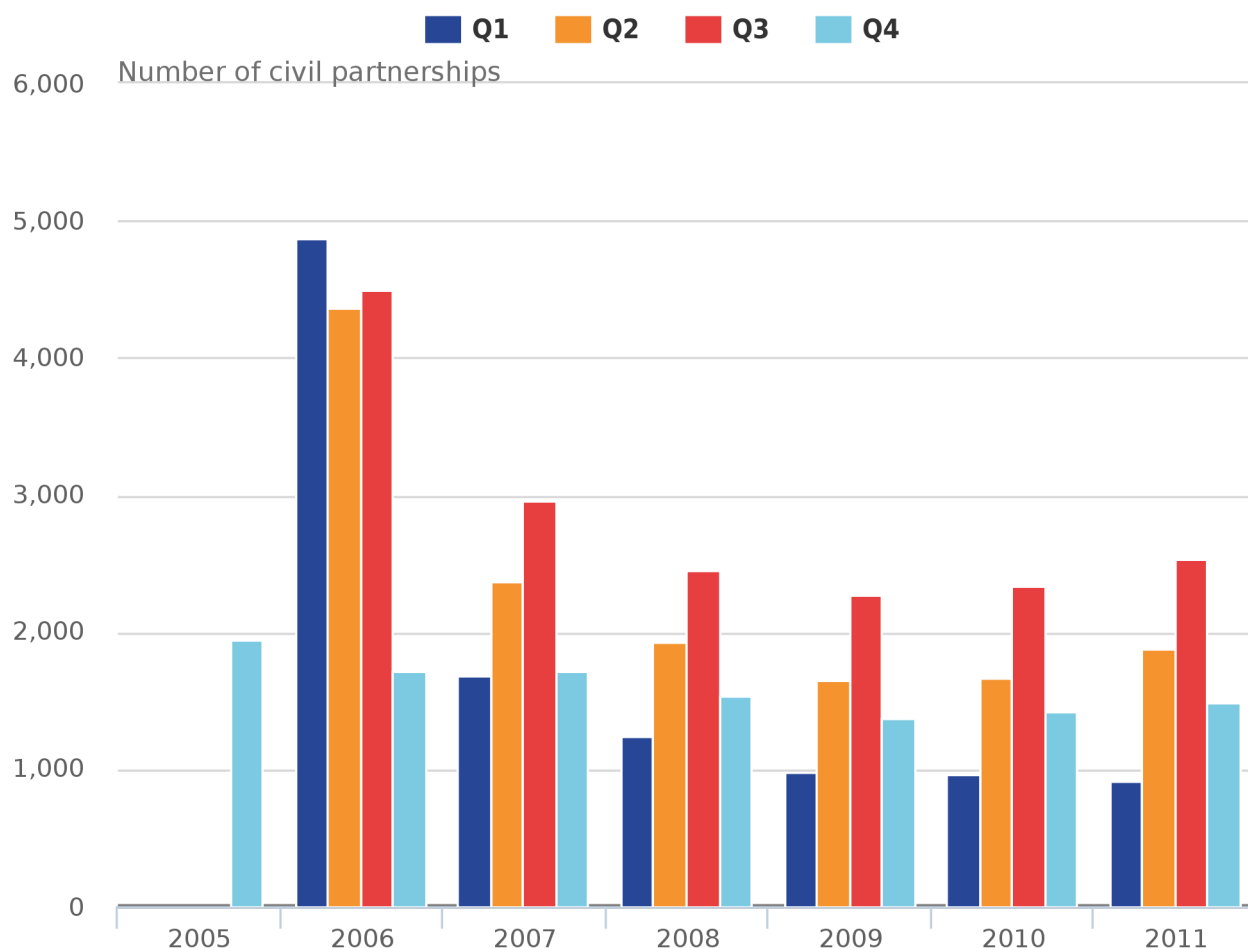
This is the first time that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published provisional annual 2011 and final annual 2010 civil partnership statistics for the UK.

3. Number of civil partnership formations

In 2011, the number of civil partnerships formed in the UK by same-sex couples was 6,795, compared with 6,385 in 2010. This represents an increase of 6.4 per cent. The total number of civil partnerships formed in the UK since the Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force in December 2005, up to the end of 2011, is 53,417. This is the equivalent to 106,834 civil partners which is much higher than was originally estimated in the regulatory impact assessment on the Civil Partnership Act 2004. The impact assessment suggested that by 2010 the estimated likely take-up of civil partnerships in Great Britain would be between 11,000 and 22,000 people in civil partnerships ([Government Equalities Office](#), 2004).

Between 2010 and 2011, the number of civil partnership formations increased in England and Scotland, with an increase of 6.6 per cent in England and an increase of 19.1 per cent in Scotland. However, the number of civil partnership formations decreased in Wales and Northern Ireland, with a decrease of 6.0 per cent in Wales and a decrease of 23.3 per cent in Northern Ireland.

Figure 1: Number of civil partnerships in the UK by quarter of occurrence, 2005–2011



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005
2. Figures for 2011 are provisional

The number of civil partnerships in the UK peaked in the first quarter of 2006 at 4,869. The high numbers for 2006 are likely to be a result of many same-sex couples in long-standing relationships taking advantage of the opportunity to formalise their relationship as soon as the legislation was implemented. The number of civil partnerships has since fallen to an average of 1,699 per quarter in 2011. This trend reflects that found in Norway and Sweden where there was a particularly high level of formations immediately after legislation was introduced, followed by a few years of stable numbers at a lower level and an increase in most recent years (Andersson et al., 2006).

In 2011, less than one person per 1,000 unmarried adults aged 16 and over entered into a civil partnership in England and Wales. Civil partnership rates cannot be calculated for the UK or Northern Ireland or Scotland as both Northern Ireland and Scotland do not currently produce population estimates by marital status (see background note 8).

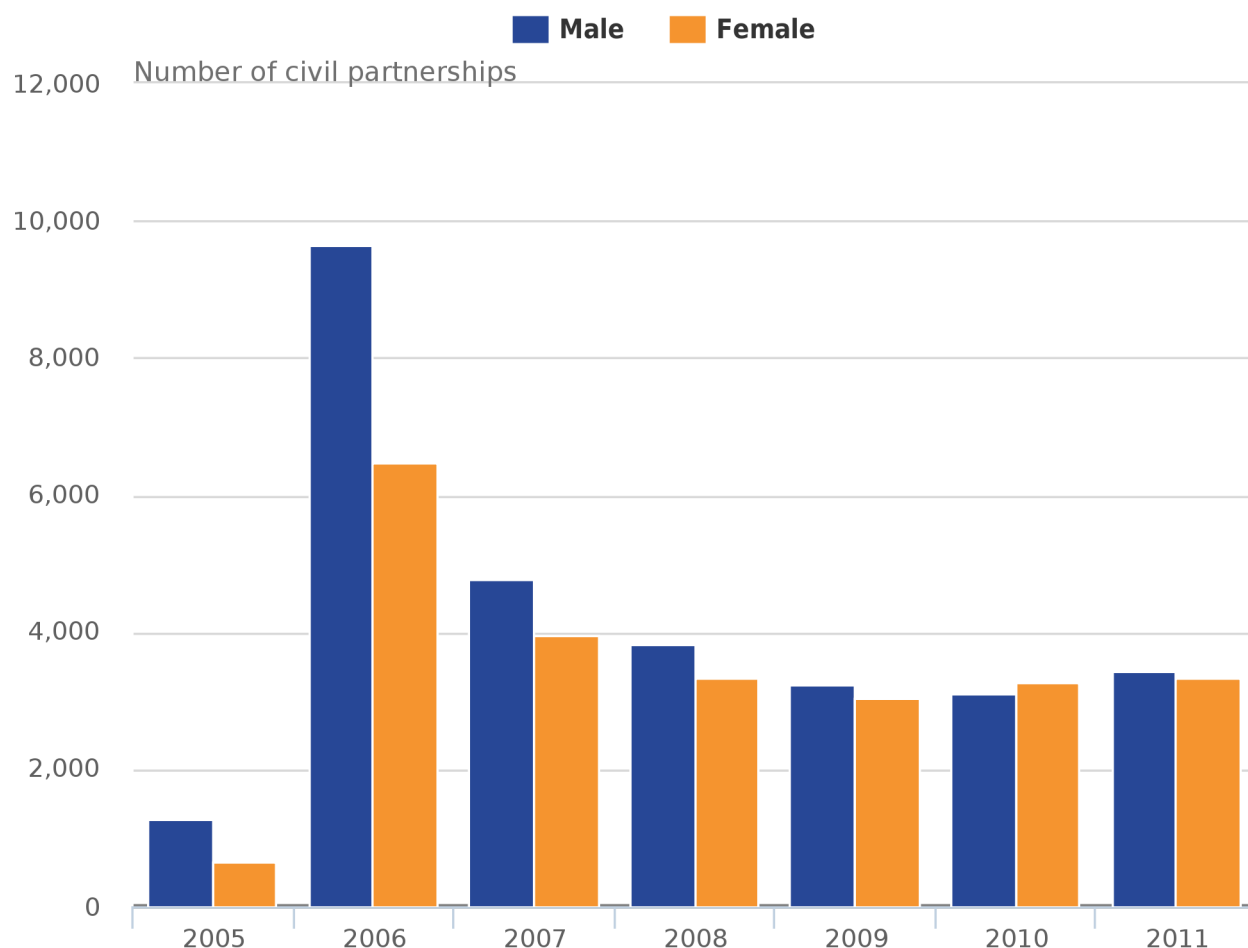
4. Civil partnerships by sex

In 2011, there were slightly more male civil partnerships (50.7 per cent) in the UK than female, whereas in 2010 there were slightly more female civil partnerships (51.2 per cent) than male. Initially the numbers of males forming civil partnerships were much higher than females. Since 2007, the numbers of male and female civil partnerships

have been converging. This reflects examples of other European countries that have seen a majority of early civil partnerships being formed by male couples followed by more converged figures (Andersson et al., 2006).

In 2011, the proportion of male civil partnerships in England and Northern Ireland was greater than female civil partnerships, at 52.1 per cent and 51.7 per cent respectively. There were much lower proportions of male civil partnerships in Scotland (41.0 per cent) and Wales (38.5 per cent).

Figure 2: Number of civil partnerships in the UK, by sex, 2005–2011



Source: Office for National Statistics

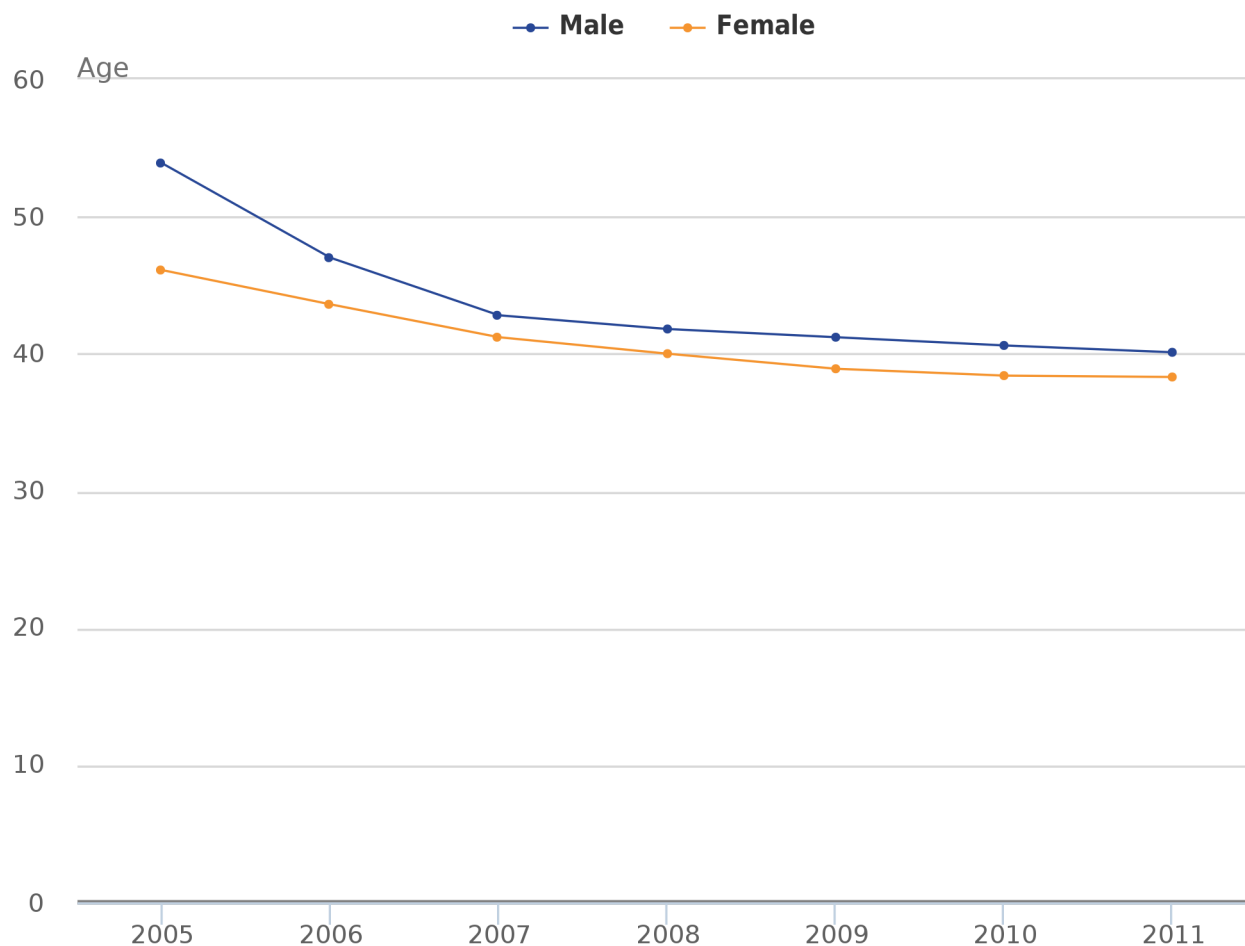
Notes:

1. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005
2. Figures for 2011 are provisional

5. Civil partnerships by age

The mean age at formation of civil partnership in the UK fell from 40.6 years in 2010 to 40.1 in 2011 for men, and for women from 38.4 years in 2010 to 38.3 in 2011. The average age at formation has been decreasing year-on-year as older couples who had waited for the introduction of the legislation took the opportunity to form a civil partnership early on.

Figure 3: Mean age at civil partnership formation in the UK, 2005–2011



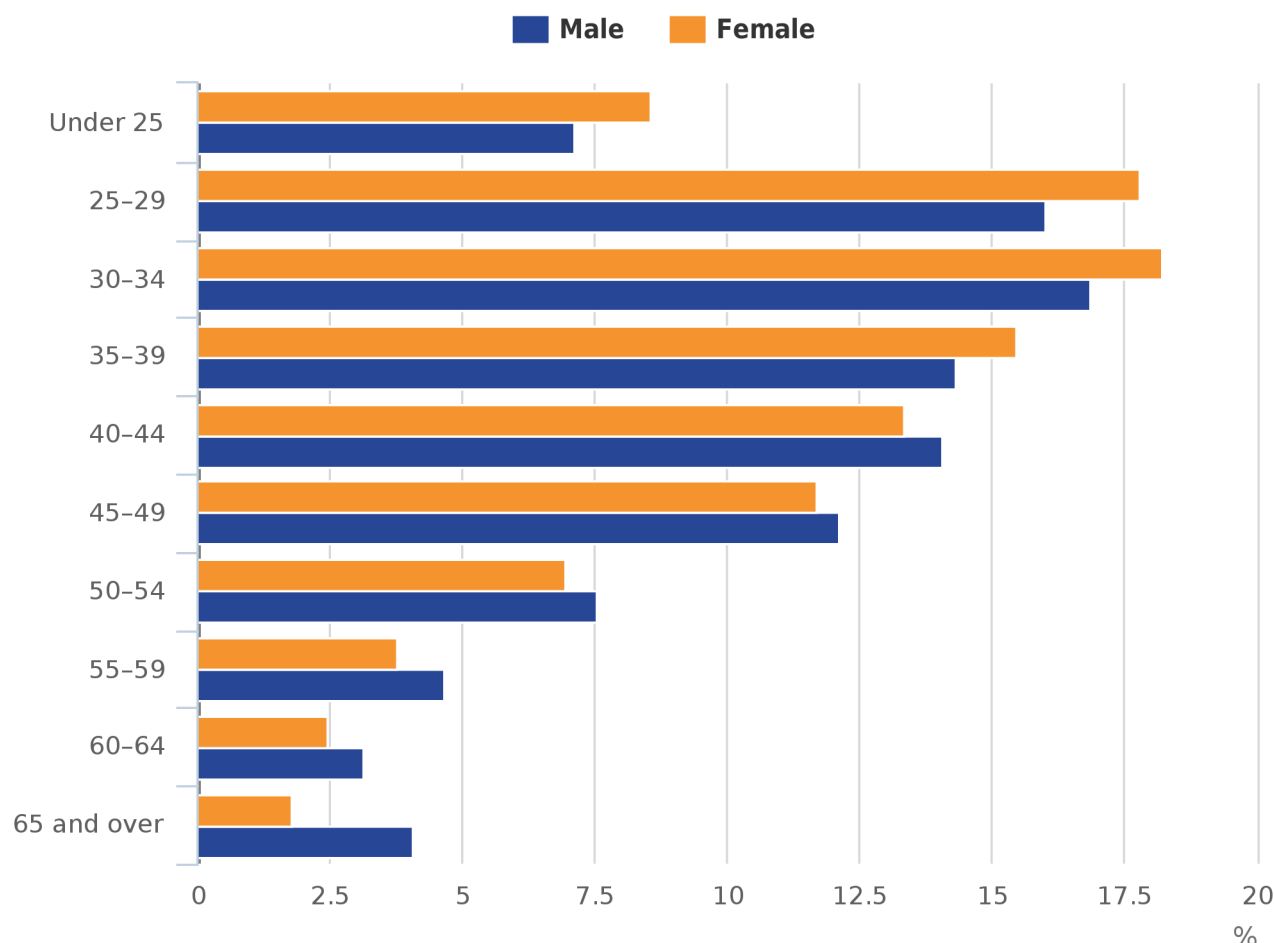
Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005
2. Figures for 2011 are provisional

The average age at civil partnership formation for males in 2011 was highest in Wales (41.1 years) and lowest in Northern Ireland (38.9 years). For females, the average age was also highest in Wales (38.6 years) and lowest in Northern Ireland (37.0 years). The average age at civil partnership formation for males and females in England was 40.1 years and 38.3 years respectively, and 39.9 years for males and 38.1 years for females in Scotland.

Figure 4: Percentage of civil partners in the UK, by age group, 2011



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures for 2011 are provisional

In 2011, there were more female civil partners in the lower age groups (under 25 to 39) and more male civil partners in the higher age groups (40 to 65 and over). This reflects the higher average age at formation of civil partnerships for men than women. The highest proportions of civil partners were those aged 30 to 34 for both males and females. In 2010, the most common age groups for men to form a civil partnership was 40 to 44 years while for women the most common age group was 35 to 39 years.

6. Civil partnerships by area of formation

The local authorities with the largest number of civil partnership registrations in 2011 were the London borough of Westminster (219 male and 56 female partnerships) and Brighton and Hove unitary authority (121 male and 101 female partnerships).

London has been the most popular region in England and Wales to register a civil partnership in every year since the legislation was introduced in 2005. In 2011, 25.5 per cent of all civil partnerships were registered there (1,731 civil partnerships).

The distribution of civil partnership formations across England and Wales by county, local and unitary authority, metropolitan district and London borough is not evenly spread. A couple may choose to register their civil partnership in any registry office or approved location across the UK. Data by area represent the area in which the partnership was registered and are not necessarily a good indicator of the area of usual residence.

7. Civil partnerships by previous partnership status

In 2011, the majority (73.2 per cent) of civil partnerships formed in the UK were to couples where both partners were single. However, 10.7 per cent of men and 20.4 per cent of women forming a civil partnership in the UK had been in a previous marriage or civil partnership. These were similar to the proportions for 2010.

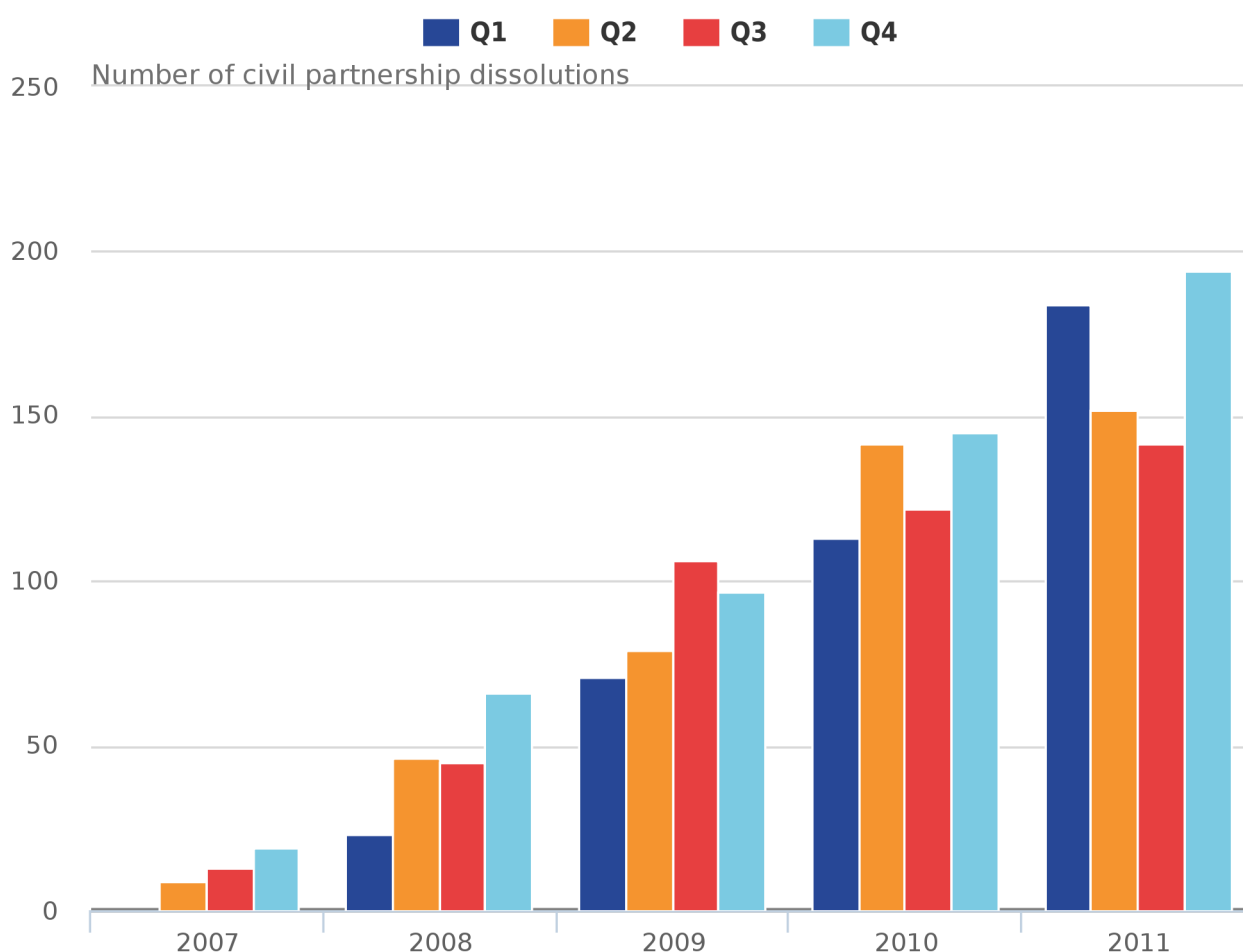
The proportion of those forming a civil partnership who had been in a previous marriage or civil partnership in 2011, was highest in Wales (18.7 per cent) and lowest in Northern Ireland (12.4 per cent). The proportion in Scotland was 15.7 per cent, while in England it was 15.4 per cent. In 2011 there were 197 people forming a civil partnership in the UK who had been in a previous civil partnership which had ended by dissolution or death.

8. Number of dissolutions

To obtain a civil partnership dissolution in the UK, a couple must have been in either a registered civil partnership or a same-sex partnership recognised abroad for 12 months. There were 672 civil partnership dissolutions granted in 2011, compared with 522 in 2010 (a 28.7 per cent increase). Of these 672 dissolutions, 624 were in England and Wales, 44 were in Scotland, and 4 were in Northern Ireland. The rise in the number of dissolutions in the UK was to be expected as the number of civil partners living in the UK continues to increase.

By the end of 2011, 2.2 per cent of male civil partnerships in the UK had ended in dissolution, while 4.6 per cent of all UK female partnerships had ended in dissolution (see background note 7).

Figure 5: Number of civil partnership dissolutions in the UK, by quarter of occurrence, 2007–2011



Notes:

1. Figures for 2011 are provisional

9. Dissolutions by age, sex, and previous partnership status

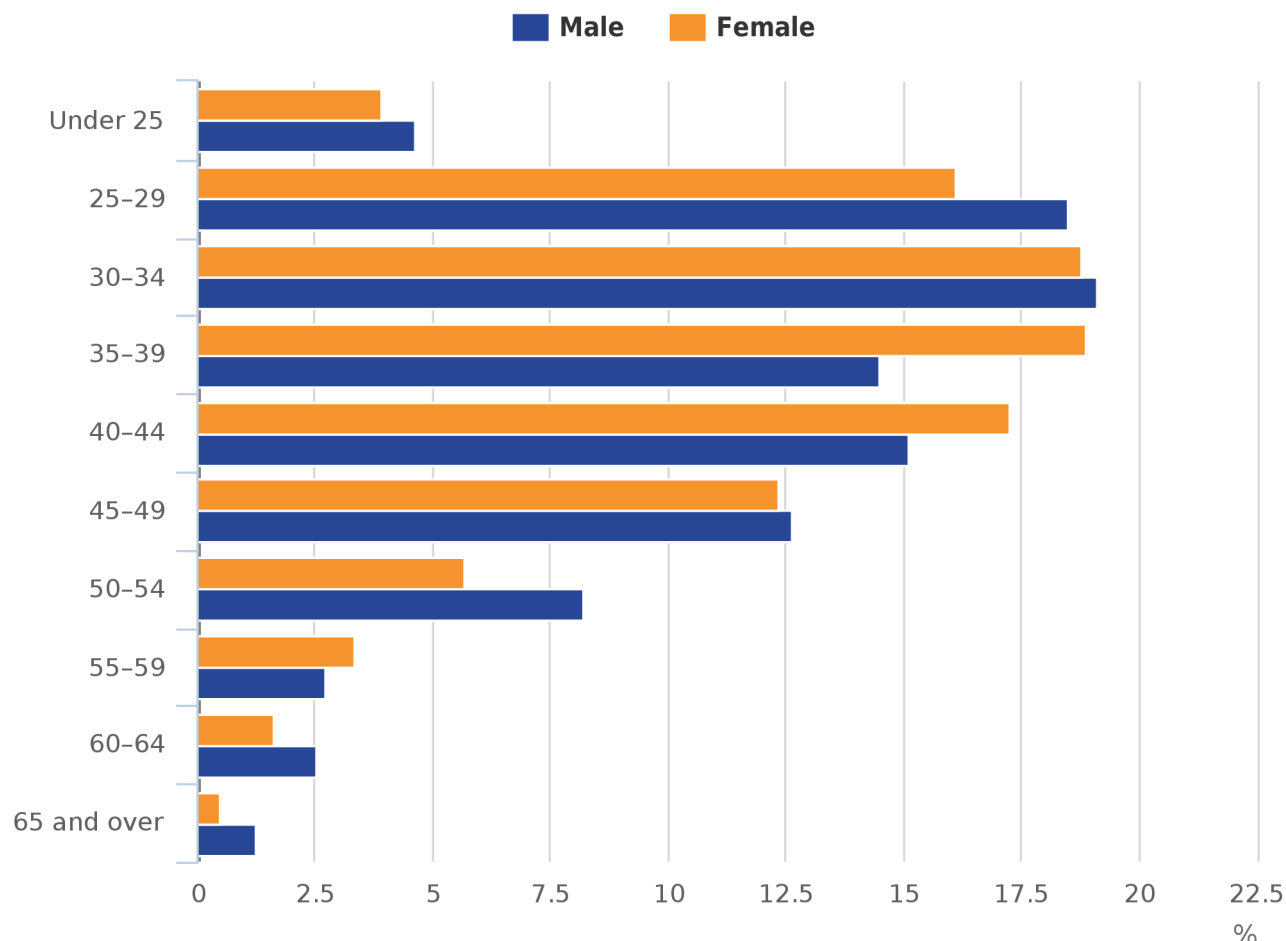
In 2011, 64.6 per cent of all dissolutions in the UK were to female couples (434 dissolutions) while the remaining 35.4 per cent were to male couples (238 dissolutions). There were more women dissolving civil partnerships than men in all countries. In Northern Ireland all dissolutions were to female couples (4 dissolutions).

In England and Wales 64.6 per cent of all civil partnership dissolutions were to female couples (403 dissolutions), while in Scotland 61.4 per cent of dissolutions were to female couples (27 dissolutions). Higher numbers of dissolutions among female than male partnerships are also seen in other countries with same-sex partnership laws, such as Norway and Sweden (Andersson et al., 2006).

The mean age at dissolution of civil partnership in the UK in 2011 was 38.9 years for men (a decrease from 39.4 years in 2010) and 38.6 for women (an increase from 37.5 years in 2010). Male civil partners are on average older than females when they dissolve a civil partnership. This reflects the higher age at formation of civil partnerships for men than women.

The average age of all partners dissolving a civil partnership in 2011 was highest in England and Wales (38.8 years) and lowest in Northern Ireland (36.5 years). The average age in Scotland was 38.1 years. In the UK there were more dissolutions to male partners aged 50 and over (14.7 per cent) than female partners aged 50 and over (11.1 per cent). This is likely to reflect the higher number of male civil partnership formations that take place at ages 50 and over compared with female civil partnership formations.

Figure 6: Percentage of civil partnership dissolutions in the UK, by age group of partners, 2011



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures for 2011 are provisional

In 2011, the majority (83.1 per cent) of civil partnership dissolutions in the UK were to partners whose previous partnership status was single. However, 8.8 per cent of men (a decrease from 11.4 per cent in 2010) and 18.7 per cent of women (an increase from 15.8 per cent in 2010) dissolving a civil partnership in the UK had been in a previous marriage or civil partnership.

10. Users of civil partnership statistics

Key users of civil partnership statistics include the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and the Welsh Government (WG). GEO takes the lead on all civil partnership matters and uses Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for answering any policy-based questions they receive. WG also uses ONS civil partnership statistics to produce their own release specifically relating to Welsh data.

Organisations covering gay and lesbian rights and equality issues, for example, Stonewall, use ONS civil partnership statistics to support their campaigns and pass on the data to their own users. Businesses such as civil partnership celebration planners (for example Pink Weddings) use the data published by area as a prediction of the amount of business they might expect.

11. References

Andersson, G, Noack, T, Seierstad, A and Weedon-Fekjaer H (2006) 'The Demographics of Same-Sex Marriages in Norway and Sweden', *Demography* 43: 79-98.

Government Equalities Office (2004) [Final Regulatory Assessment: Civil Partnership Act 2004](#).

12. Further information

More data on [Civil Partnerships in the UK](#) in 2011 are available on the ONS website.

A [Quality and Methodology Information document \(231.9 Kb Pdf\)](#) for civil partnership statistics is available on the ONS website.

Annual civil partnership figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#).

[National Records of Scotland](#) provides civil partnership statistics for Scotland.

[Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) provides civil partnership statistics for Northern Ireland.

Statistics on [Marriages](#) and [Divorces](#), are available on the ONS website. There is also data on [Families and Households](#), including [Cohabitation Estimates](#).

[Population Estimates by Marital Status](#) provide the estimated resident population by single year of age, sex and marital status (single, married, divorced, and widowed) for England and Wales.

An article examining [civil partnerships in England and Wales five years \(190.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) on from its introduction was published in the September 2011 edition of *Population Trends*. This article examines civil partnerships and dissolutions between 2005 and 2010, and compares these figures to marriage and divorce figures over the same period.

The article had an accompanying [video podcast](#), using audio commentary and graphical animations to cover the key trends.

A user feedback survey for the civil partnerships tables took place in July 2011. The results and responses to this survey will be published in August 2012.

13. Background notes

1. The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) came into force on 5 December 2005 in the UK, the first day couples could give notice of their intention to form a civil partnership. The Act enables same-sex couples aged 16 and over to obtain legal recognition of their relationship. The first day that couples could normally form a partnership was 19 December 2005 in Northern Ireland, 20 December 2005 in Scotland and 21 December 2005 in England and Wales.
2. Civil partnership formations data for Northern Ireland, Scotland and the UK are provisional. Civil partnership dissolutions data are provisional for all countries.
3. The figures relate only to civil partnerships taking place in the constituent countries of the UK. They do not include civil partnerships of UK residents taking place abroad but will include non-UK residents who form a partnership in the UK.
4. Figures for civil partnership formations in England and Wales are based on date of formation. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are based on date of registration. The impact of this difference is negligible.
5. Data on civil partnership formations are based on area of formation and not area of residence.
6. Data on civil partnership dissolutions are based on country of dissolution and not country of residence.
7. The figures on the percentage of civil partnerships ending in dissolution are derived from the numbers of civil partnerships and dissolutions taking place in the UK since the Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into

force in December 2005. This does not take into account the fact that some civil partnerships which took place in the UK may be dissolved in another country or that some dissolutions may take place in the UK for a civil partnership which was formed in another country.

8. Civil partnership rates are published for England and Wales (combined) only. The civil partnership rate is the number of people forming a civil partnership per 1,000 unmarried population aged 16 and over (unmarried means single, widowed or divorced).

The population estimates by marital status used to calculate rates in this bulletin are the latest available. Rates for England and Wales 2011 are based on mid-2010 marital status estimates. Civil partnership status is not included in the mid-year population estimates by marital status hence the unmarried population provides the most appropriate denominator for rates. Further information on [population estimates by marital status](#) can be found on the ONS website.

Marital status estimates are not produced for the United Kingdom or Northern Ireland hence the corresponding civil partnership rates are not available. The latest population estimates by marital status available for Scotland are for 2008, therefore no rates after 2008 have been calculated. The production of population estimates by marital status for 2009 and future years have been postponed and demand will be reviewed by National Records of Scotland in 2013/14. Population estimates by marital status are not available for Northern Ireland, hence rates cannot be calculated.

9. The mean ages presented in this release have not been standardised for age and therefore do not take account of the changing structure of the male/female population by age and marital status.
10. Areas are defined as non-metropolitan counties, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities (within England); unitary authorities (within Wales); council areas (within Scotland); and health trusts (within Northern Ireland).
11. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
12. A list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the statistics and written commentary is available in [Civil Partnerships 2011, Pre-release access list \(31.4 Kb Pdf\)](#). The rules and principles which govern pre-release access are featured within the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008](#).
13. Special extracts and tabulations of civil partnership data are available to order for a charge (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreement of costs, where appropriate). Such enquiries should be made to:

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The [ONS charging policy](#) is available on the ONS website.

14. We would welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. The Health and Life Events user engagement strategy is available to download from the ONS website. Please send feedback to the postal or email address above.
15. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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
- 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.