

Statistical bulletin

# Marriages in England and Wales: 2013

Number of marriages that took place in England and Wales analysed by age, sex, previous marital status and civil or religious ceremony.



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# 1 . Main points

- There were 240,854 marriages in 2013, a decrease of 8.6% compared with 2012 and the first decline since 2009.
- Civil ceremonies accounted for 72% of all marriages in 2013.
- Religious ceremonies decreased by 14% while civil ceremonies declined by 6% in 2013, compared with 2012.
- Over three-quarters of brides and grooms marrying in 2013 were marrying for the first time.
- Those aged 65 and over were more likely to marry in 2013 compared with 2003, with the greatest increase among women.
- The mean age at marriage was 36.7 years for men and 34.3 years for women in 2013, a small increase compared with 2012.

## 2 . Statistician's quote

"Fewer people got married in England and Wales in 2013, the first decrease in marriages since 2009. The fall could indicate the continuation of the long-term decline in marriages since 1972 or could be due to couples choosing to postpone their marriage to avoid the number 13 which is perceived as unlucky by many cultures."

Elizabeth McLaren, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics follow [@StatsLiz](#) on Twitter.

## 3 . Things you need to know

- Marriage statistics are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement.
- Figures represent civil and religious marriages that take place in England and Wales only.
- Marriages to residents of England and Wales that took place abroad are not included, while marriages that took place in England and Wales to non-residents are included.
- Marriages of same sex couples first took place on 29 March 2014, hence are not included in this release. [Provisional statistics on marriage of same sex couples](#) are available separately.

## 4 . Fewer marriages in 2013

There were 240,854 marriages that took place in England and Wales in 2013, a decrease of 8.6% compared with 2012. This decline ends the steady rise recorded between the recent low in 2009 (232,443 marriages) and a peak in 2012. The fall in 2013 may be due to couples choosing to postpone their marriage to avoid the number 13, which can be perceived as unlucky.

The number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and women aged 16 and over (marriage rates), also decreased in 2013 for both men and women. Marriage rates take account of changes in the size of the unmarried adult population, as well as the number of marriages.

The long-term decline in marriages and marriage rates between 1972 and 2009 is a likely consequence of increasing numbers of men and women delaying marriage, or couples choosing to cohabit rather than marry, either as a precursor to marriage or as an alternative.

Factors which may have influenced the increase in marriages and the overall increase in marriage rates between 2010 and 2012 include:

- there is some evidence of an estimated decline in UK residents marrying abroad between 2009 and 2011 – marriages that would otherwise have occurred abroad may have taken place in England and Wales instead (information on the quality of these estimates is available in the Quality and methodology section, point 9)
- legitimate marriages to persons subject to immigration control became easier following the abolition of the Certificate of Approval Scheme in May 2011
- the economic downturn in 2008 and 2009 may have delayed marriages due to financial constraints, changes in employment, and related lifestyle changes
- marriages to an increasing number of couples who had decided to live together as a precursor to marriage

The percentage of men and women who have ever married has been declining over recent decades along with the percentage of men and women who have ever remarried. [More explanations of these trends are available alongside the data.](#)

## **5 . Civil ceremonies outnumber religious ceremonies**

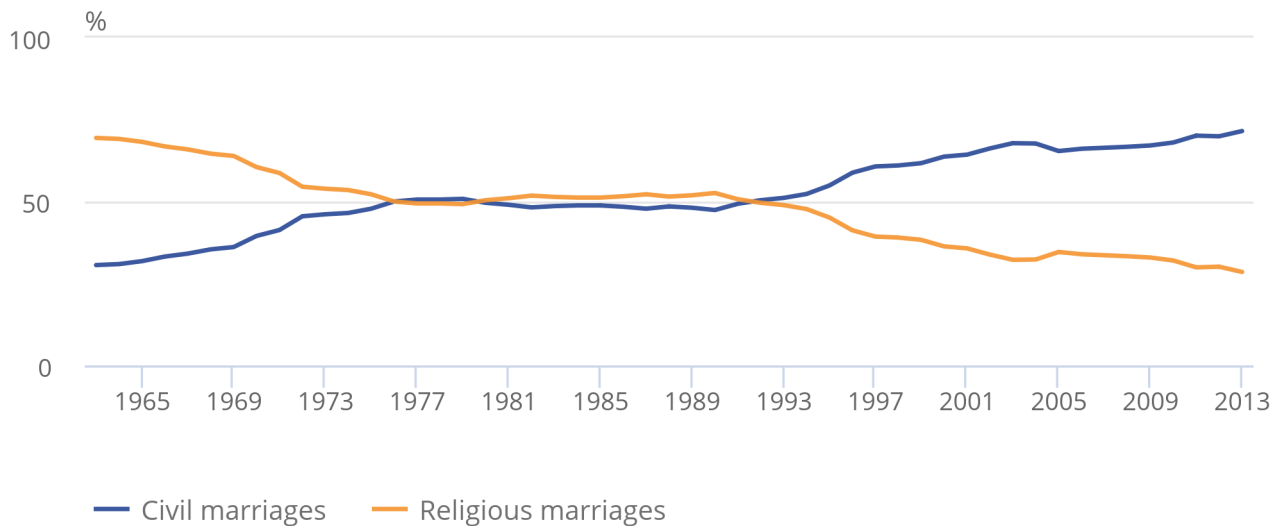
There were 172,254 civil marriage ceremonies in 2013, accounting for 72% of all marriages. The percentage of civil ceremonies has increased steadily over time. Civil marriages first exceeded religious ceremonies in 1976, and have consistently outnumbered religious marriages every year since 1992. Religious marriages accounted for just over a quarter of all marriages in 2013 (28%).

**Figure 2: Marriages by ceremony type, 1963 to 2013**

England and Wales

Figure 2: Marriages by ceremony type, 1963 to 2013

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Most civil marriages (86%) took place in approved premises (buildings such as hotels, historic buildings and stately homes licensed for civil marriages). The remaining 14% of civil marriages took place in register offices. There has been a continual increase in the proportion of marriages taking place in approved premises, coinciding with a rise in the number of approved premises available for marriages, since their introduction in 1995.

The overall fall in the number of marriages in 2013 compared with 2012, has resulted from a larger decline in religious marriages than civil marriages (14% and 6% decline respectively).

## 6 . First-time marriages continue to rise while remarriages decline

In 2013, 77% of brides and 76% of grooms were marrying for the first time.

Over two-thirds (67%) of marriages were the first marriage for both partners. Remarriages for both parties accounted for 15% of all marriages. The remaining marriages were to couples where only one partner had been previously married. The percentage of marriages which are the first marriage for both partners has increased steadily from a recent low of 58% in 2000. In contrast, remarriages for both have decreased steadily from a recent high of 19% recorded between 1995 and 2000.

## 7 . At what age are people getting married?

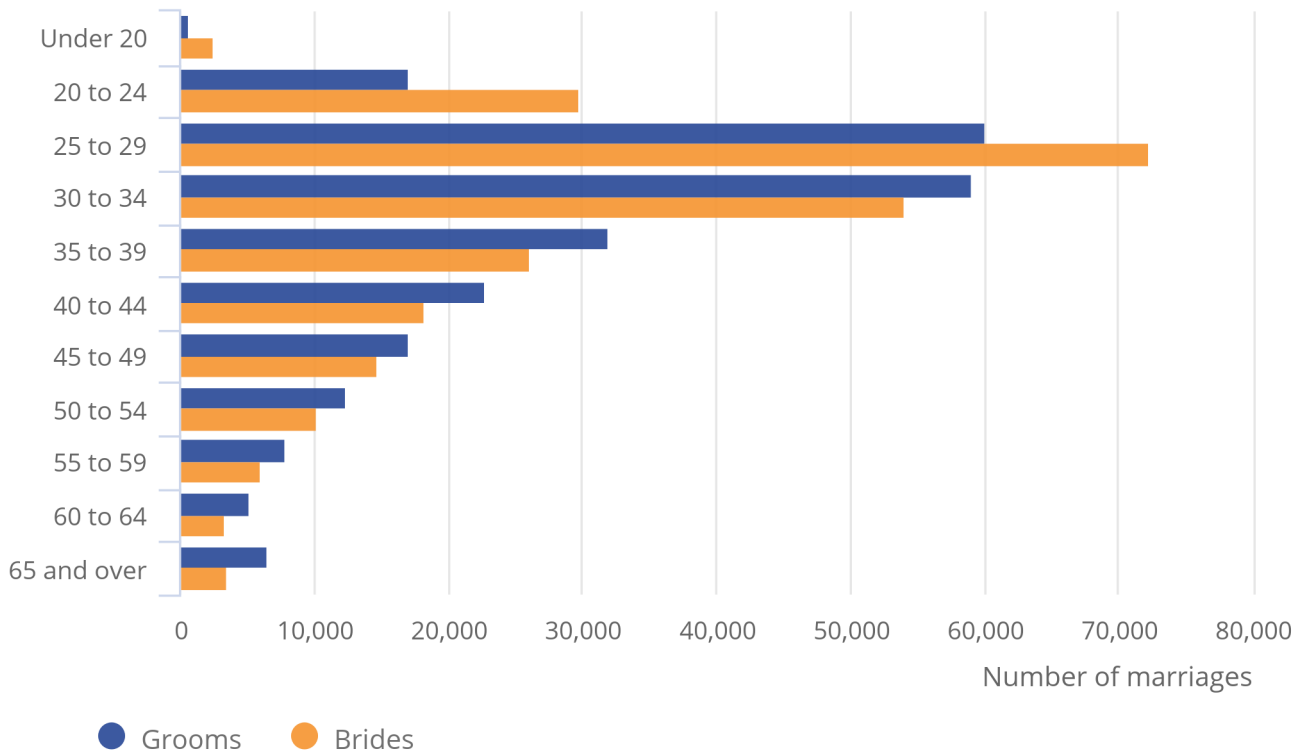
At ages under 30, more women than men married. At ages 30 and over, more men than women married. This pattern, which has been recorded since 1997, reflects that on average, men tend to form relationships with women younger than themselves.

**Figure 3: Number of marriages by age of bride and groom, 2013**

England and Wales

Figure 3: Number of marriages by age of bride and groom, 2013

England and Wales



**Source: Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

1. Figures by age will not sum to the total number of marriages because a very small number of brides and grooms have no age stated.

When considering changes in the number of marriages by age of the bride and groom, it is important to also take account of the size of the unmarried population, since any changes in this will affect the number of marriages.

Compared with 2012, the number of men and women marrying per 1,000 unmarried men/women (marriage rate) decreased or remained unchanged for all ages, except women aged 55 to 59, where there was a very small increase in 2013.

Since 2003, there has been a 33% increase in the marriage rate for women aged 65 and over. This compares with a 2% rise for men aged 65 and over. At all other ages, marriage rates have generally declined or fluctuated.

Over the last decade, men and women aged under 20 have recorded the largest percentage decrease in marriage rates (62% for men and 67% for women).

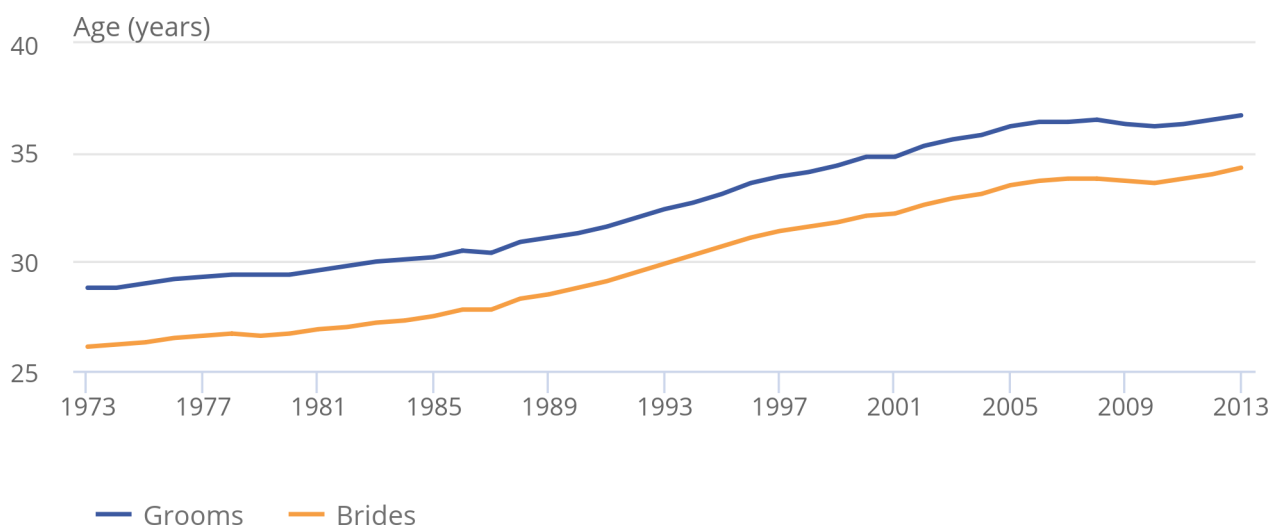
The average (mean) age for men marrying in 2013 was 36.7 years, while for women it was 34.3 years. This represents a slight increase compared with 2012 (36.5 years for men and 34.0 years for women) and continues the overall rise recorded since the 1970s.

**Figure 5: Average age at marriage for brides and grooms, 1973 to 2013**

England and Wales

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England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

For those entering their first marriage in 2013, the average age was 32.5 years for men and 30.6 years for women, representing increases of almost 8 years since 1973.

## 8. Links to related ONS statistics

For more detailed marriage statistics see our [reference tables](#) which provide a long time series, or our [explorable datasets](#) which provide detailed marriage statistics for 2011, 2012 and 2013.

The number of marriages and the marriage rate for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#).

[How have marriages of same sex couples affected the number of civil partnership formations, and how many couples have converted their civil partnership into a marriage?](#)

[What percentage of marriages end in divorce?](#) shows that the estimated percentage of marriages ending in divorce (assuming 2010 divorce and mortality rates throughout the duration of marriage) is 42%. Around half of these divorces are expected to occur in the first 10 years of marriage.

Further statistics on [divorces](#), [civil partnerships and civil partnership dissolutions](#), [families and households](#), and [population estimates](#) by marital status are available on our website.

Special extracts and tabulations of marriage data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [ONS charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch ([vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone: +44 (0)1329 444110). User requested data will be published onto [our website](#).

## 9. What has changed within this publication?

1. Following our consultation on [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics for England and Wales](#) which ran from 8 October to 17 December 2013, the data published alongside this release has changed. Summary tables now provide a long time series for comparison, with several tables providing data back to 1846. [Explorable datasets](#) can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for 2011 to 2013. A [document summarising these changes](#) and the responses we received to our consultation was published in April 2014.
2. Improvements have also been made to this bulletin and its contents, to provide a more concise summary of the main statistics. We welcome [feedback](#) on these changes.

## 10. Quality and methodology

1. This is the first time that marriage statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2013. The release provides final annual data. Prior to 2016, provisional marriage statistics were published just over a year after the end of the reference period, providing summary statistics for the latest year. The publication of provisional marriage statistics has been discontinued to ensure value for money across our outputs.
2. It is currently only possible to publish final annual marriage statistics around 26 months after the end of the reference year. This is due to delays in the submission of marriage entries by the clergy and registrars. Figures are published once we consider the annual dataset is acceptably complete. Marriage records received after our annual dataset is taken are not included in published figures. A table in our [User Guide to Marriage Statistics](#) shows that the difference between the number of marriages stored on our database, and the number included in our publications each year, has been less than a 0.4% since 2002. Although this means some marriages are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise which must be taken in order to publish as timely data as possible.

We hope to improve the timeliness of marriage statistics in future years. We continue to work with the General Register Office monitoring the receipt of marriage registrations.

3. Marriage statistics are compiled to enable the analysis of social and demographic trends. They are also used for considering and monitoring policy changes, most recently the introduction of marriages of same sex couples.
4. The [Marriages Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:
  - the strengths and limitations of the data

- the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data, how it compares with related data
  - uses and users
  - how the output was created
5. Our [User Guide to Marriage Statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages and includes a glossary of terms.
  6. Marriage statistics are comparable between countries within the UK; more information on comparability is contained in Marriages [Quality and Methodology Information](#).
  7. The [Revisions policy for marriage statistics](#) is available on our website.
  8. The mean (average) 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.
  9. Estimates of the number of marriages abroad are derived from the International Passenger Survey. They are based on a very small number of interviews and have correspondingly high standard errors.