

Statistical bulletin

# Marriages in England and Wales: 2021 and 2022

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

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## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Marriages](#)
3. [Marriages in England and Wales data](#)
4. [Glossary](#)
5. [Measuring the data](#)
6. [Strengths and limitations](#)
7. [Related links](#)
8. [Cite this statistical bulletin](#)

# 1 . Main points

- There were 246,897 marriages in England and Wales in 2022, a return to pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels, and 12.3% more marriages than took place in 2019.
- The numbers of marriages and marriage rates in 2021 and 2022 may reflect a short-term delay and recovery because of COVID-19 restrictions and may not be representative of long-term trends.
- There was a record number of same-sex marriages in 2022, with 7,800 in total (3.2% of all marriages); the highest number of female same-sex marriages (4,896) since same-sex marriage was introduced in 2014 was the main factor.
- Marriage rates returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2022; rates were 20.8 men and 19.1 women marrying per 1,000 unmarried men and women, respectively.
- More than 9 in 10 couples who married in 2021 or 2022 were cohabitating prior to marriage; cohabitation prior to opposite-sex marriages was the highest since records began in 1994.
- The median age for an opposite-sex marriage (and first legal partnership), was 32.7 years for men and 31.2 years for women, both of which are the highest median ages on record; for a same-sex marriage (and first legal partnership), the median ages for men and women were higher at 36.2 years and 32.6 years, respectively.

## 2 . Marriages

### Marriage numbers

Throughout this bulletin, comparisons are made with 2019 figures as the last complete year of data prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Marriages in 2021 were still being affected by the pandemic, although most restrictions on social distancing, face coverings and attendance numbers were lifted by the summer. These restrictions may have had an impact on the number of marriages in 2021. By February 2022, all restrictions were lifted, however the number of marriages in 2022 may still have been affected as restrictions in the previous two years altered some couples' wedding plans.

There were 246,897 marriages in England and Wales in 2022, 12.3% more when compared with 2019 (219,850). There were 239,097 opposite-sex marriages, 12.2% more compared with 2019 (213,122) and 7,800 same-sex marriages, 15.9% more compared with 2019 (6,728). These increases may be a result of delayed marriages because of the pandemic.

As recent trends have shown, of all same-sex marriages in 2022, there were more female same-sex couples marrying (62.8%) than male. This was the highest proportion of same-sex marriages between female couples compared with male couples since same-sex marriage was introduced in 2014.

In the 30 years from 1992 to 2022, overall numbers of marriages had decreased by 20.8%, from 311,564. While the number of marriages has been falling over time, in 2022 they accounted for the majority (97.3%) of all legal partnership formations (a civil partnership or a marriage). In 2022, there were a total of 6,879 civil partnerships making up 2.7% of all legal partnership formations. The majority of these were opposite-sex civil partnership formations (2.3%), while 0.4% were same-sex civil partnerships (Figure 1). For more information please see our [Civil partnership in England and Wales: 2022 bulletin](#).

### Figure 1: Opposite-sex marriage is the most common type of legal partnership formation in England and Wales

Partnership type as a percentage of all legal partnership formations, 2022

In 2022, 17.0% of marriages were religious ceremonies and 83.0% were civil. There has been a steady increase in civil ceremonies over time, with half of marriages in 1992 being civil ceremonies (50.4%). It should be noted that some religious ceremonies take place at unregistered premises. Couples would also need to have ceremonies in a registry office or approved building to be legally registered. These would only be counted within the figures for civil ceremonies.

## Marriage rates

Marriage rates provide a better indication of changing trends. They account for changes in the adult population not in a legal partnership, that is those who are referred to as "unmarried" in relation to the number of marriages.

There has been a steady decline in opposite-sex marriage rates over time (Figure 2). This has been compounded by a sharp decrease in rates in 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. However, in 2022, opposite-sex marriage rates returned to pre-pandemic rates with 20.3 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and 18.3 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women. This increase may partly reflect marriages that were delayed or postponed because of the pandemic.

Male same-sex marriage rates also returned to pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2), with 0.5 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men. Meanwhile, female same-sex marriage rates were at the highest recorded level of 0.8 marriages.

Overall marriage rates returned to being higher than divorce rates in 2021 and 2022, following the drop in marriage rates during the pandemic (6.7 men and 6.6 women divorced per 1,000 married men and women in 2022). For more information, please see our [Divorces in England and Wales: 2022 bulletin](#). A new [divorce law](#) came into effect on 6 April 2022, allowing no-fault divorces for the first time. This may have had an impact on the number of divorces, both before and after its introduction.

### Figure 2: There has been a steady decline in marriage rates over time

Marriage rates for opposite-sex and same-sex marriages by sex, England and Wales, 1971 to 2022

#### Notes

1. Some shorthand is used in this table, [x] = not available
2. Rates for both opposite-sex and same-sex marriages are calculated per 1,000 unmarried men and women. As there are a lot fewer same-sex marriages, the rates for same-sex marriages are much lower than for opposite-sex marriages.

## Age at marriage

The median age for those marrying an opposite-sex partner in their first legal partnership in 2022 was aged 32.7 years for men and aged 31.2 years for women. These are the highest median ages recorded for men entering an opposite-sex marriage having never been in any legal partnership before. Those forming same-sex marriages were older than those forming opposite-sex marriages; the median age for men marrying a partner of the same sex as their first legal partnership was aged 36.2 years and the median age for women was aged 32.6 years. Men have continued to be generally older than women when getting married.

The age at which both men and women marry has increased for more recent generations. More than half of women born in 1983 had been or were married by aged 35 years. In comparison, for men born in the same year, more than half had been or were married by aged 40 years.

The age range with the highest number of marriages has increased over time for both men and women (Figure 3). Historically, the largest number of marriages were to men and women in their twenties. More recently, the highest number of marriages have occurred to people in their thirties, although the overall number of marriages have fallen over time.

In 2022, those aged 30 to 34 years had the highest number of opposite-sex marriages for both men and women. Same-sex marriages were introduced in 2014, and in 2022 those aged 30 to 34 years were also the most common age group for people entering these marriages.

### Figure 3: The age at which people are marrying has increased over time

Number of marriages by sex and age, England and Wales, selected years 1942 to 2022

#### Notes

1. In 1942, 2,229 men and 2,281 women did not state their ages, therefore these are not shown in the graph.

## Previous partnership status

In 2022, the most common previous legal partnership status was "never married", which includes those who have never been in a legal partnership. Over three-quarters of men and women forming opposite-sex marriages had never been previously married (77.4% and 78.7%, respectively). While percentages in 2022 are higher than thirty years ago (71.9% for men and 72.4% for women), this is the most common previous legal partnership status since records began.

For marriages between same-sex partners in 2022, the percentage of men and women who had never been married was higher than for opposite-sex marriages, with 89.0% of men and 81.0% of women having never previously been in a legal partnership. This partly reflects the relatively recent introduction of same-sex legal partnerships.

For those who had previously been in a legal partnership, the most common age range for a man to remarry in 2022 was aged 60 to 69 years, with 10,061 men remarrying (with 12.5% having been widowed, and 87.5% divorced, or had a civil partnership dissolved). Women were more likely to remarry younger than men, at aged 50 to 54 years, with 8,840 remarrying, the large majority (94.6%) of which were divorced or had a civil partnership dissolved.

## Cohabitation

Cohabitation prior to marriage has increased over time. In 2022, the highest levels of cohabitation prior to an opposite-sex marriage were recorded with 9 in 10 couples having previously cohabited. This compares with 59.6% of couples having cohabited prior to marriage in 1994, the earliest year the data are available.

Levels of cohabitation prior to same-sex marriages in 2022 were higher than those in opposite-sex marriages, at 95.2% for men and 93.5% for women, and remain consistently above 90%. Same-sex cohabitation levels prior to marriage across most age ranges are higher than when compared with opposite-sex marriages; the exceptions being for men and women in their 60s and men aged 70 to 74 years.

Cohabitation prior to an opposite-sex marriage in 2022 was higher among couples that had a civil ceremony (91.3%), compared with those that had a religious wedding (83.7%).

## Marriages by area and day of the week

The areas that saw the largest percentage changes in the number of marriages between 2019 and 2022 were Monmouthshire, where marriages increased by 67.4%, and Haringey where marriages fell by 51.1%. The South East was the region where the greatest proportion (16.4%) of marriages took place in England and Wales in 2022; the same region as in 2019.

The most popular day to get married on in 2022 was Saturday 30 July, with a total of 3,608 marriages. While the percentage of marriages occurring on a Saturday is decreasing with time, a Saturday continues to be the most popular day of the week to get married with 43.6% of all marriages in 2022 taking place on a Saturday. In recent years either the first Saturday in September or last Saturday in July tend to be the most popular days on which to get married. With three weddings on Christmas Day in 2022, this remained the least popular day to get married on.

## 3 . Marriages in England and Wales data

[Marriages in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 20 June 2024

Annual statistics on the number of marriages that took place in England and Wales analysed by age, sex, previous partnership status and civil or religious ceremony.

## 4 . Glossary

### Civil marriage

A civil marriage can take place at a register office or other buildings approved for civil marriage. Both partners must personally give a formal notice of their intention to marry or form a civil partnership to the superintendent registrar of the district(s) where they have resided for the previous seven days.

### Religious marriage

Religious marriages can take place in Church of England or Church in Wales premises, as well as in other buildings registered for marriage that are certified as a place of worship. Religious marriages also include marriages that took place according to the rites of the Society of Friends or Judaism.

## Unmarried population

The unmarried adult population in this release refers to men and women aged 16 years and over who have never entered a legal partnership (marriage or civil partnership), who are divorced (including those whose previous civil partnership has dissolved) or who are widowed (including surviving civil partners). For future releases the unmarried adult population will refer to those aged 18 years and over following a change in law introduced on 27 February 2023.

## First marriages

First marriages refer to marriages where one or both partners had never previously been married or formed a civil partnership.

## Remarriages

Remarriages refer to marriages where one or both partners were previously married or had formed a civil partnership.

## Legal partnership

A legal partnership refers to either a civil partnership or marriage between an opposite-sex or same-sex couple.

# 5 . Measuring the data

This is the first time that final marriage statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2021 and 2022. The release provides final annual data.

- 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 took place in England and Wales only.
- Marriages to residents of England and Wales that took place elsewhere 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 and are included in these statistics.
- Same-sex couples in a civil partnership have been able to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage, if they so desired, from 10 December 2014; these are not included in the marriage statistics but are reported separately. Opposite-sex couples in a civil partnership are currently unable to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in our [Marriages in England and Wales quality and methodology information \(QMI\) report](#).

# 6 . Strengths and limitations

Our [User guide to marriage statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages and includes a more detailed glossary of terms.

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.

## Timeliness of marriages in England and Wales data

It was previously only possible to publish final annual marriage statistics around 26 months after the end of the reference year because of delays in the submission of religious marriage entries by the clergy and authorised persons. It was estimated that each year around 4% of religious marriage returns received at the Office for National Statistics remained outstanding one year after the reference period. Marriage statistics are published once we consider the annual dataset is acceptably complete. More information on this can be found in our [User guide to marriage statistics](#).

However, following the introduction of the [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc.\) Act 2019](#) (that came into force on 4 May 2021), we have reduced the delay in the submission of religious marriage entries and therefore improved the timeliness of future marriage statistics. For this reason, the 2022 marriages have been published sooner than previous estimates of marriages would have been.

## Comparability

Marriage statistics are comparable between countries within the UK. More information on comparability, including comparability with survey data sources, is available in our [Marriages quality and methodology information \(QMI\) report](#).

## 7 . Related links

### [Marriage and civil partnership status, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Article | Released 22 February 2023

Details adults' legal partnership status, including changes over time, where groups of each legal partnership status live, education, ethnicity and religion.

### [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements: 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 January 2024

Annual estimates of population by legal marital status and cohabitation status by age and sex for England and Wales.

### [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#)

Dataset | Released 24 February 2023

Annual UK and constituent country figures for births, deaths, marriages, divorces, civil partnerships and civil partnership dissolutions for the latest years available.

### [Civil partnerships in England and Wales: 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 29 February 2024

Annual statistics on formations and dissolutions of civil partnerships analysed by the couples' sex, age, previous marital status, and the place of registration.

### [Divorces in England and Wales: 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 22 February 2024

Annual divorce and civil partnership dissolution numbers and rates, partnership type, to whom granted and duration of marriage.

## 8 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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