

# Civil partnerships in England and Wales QMI

Quality and Methodology Information for civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics, detailing the strengths and limitations of the data, methods used and data uses and users.

Contact:  
Kanak Ghosh  
Health.data@ons.gov.uk  
+44 1329 444 110

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# 1 . Output information

<b>National Statistic</b>	
<b>Survey name</b>	Civil partnerships in England and Wales
<b>Frequency</b>	Annual
<b>How compiled</b>	Based on third-party data
<b>Geographic coverage</b>	England and Wales
<b>Last revised</b>	13 December 2021

## 2 . About this Quality and Methodology Information report

This quality and methodology report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data (including the European Statistical System five dimensions of quality) and the methods used to create it.

The information in this report will help you to:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- understand the methods used to create the data
- help you to decide suitable uses for the data
- reduce the risk of misusing data

## 3 . Important points about civil partnerships statistics

- Civil partnership formation statistics are derived from information recorded when civil partnerships are registered as part of civil registration; these data represent the legal record, making them the most complete data source.
- Figures represent civil partnerships formed between couples of the same sex in England and Wales only, which are available back to 2005; civil partnership formations to residents of England and Wales which take place abroad are not included.
- Civil partnership formations between couples of the opposite sex, which began on 31 December 2019, are included for the first time.
- Civil partnership dissolution statistics are derived from information recorded by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) during the dissolution process; figures include annulments.
- Our dissolution statistics for couples of the same sex are available back to 2007; they do not include couples who separate but do not dissolve their civil partnership. Dissolution statistics for couples of the opposite sex are not yet available.
- Dissolutions where the civil partnership formation took place abroad are included provided the civil partnership was legally recognised in the UK and one of the parties had a permanent home in England and Wales.
- [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) (NISRA) publish regular civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland; [National Records of Scotland](#) and [Scottish Government](#) publish regular civil partnership and dissolutions statistics respectively for Scotland.
- Statistics on marriages of same-sex couples which have been possible in England and Wales since 29 March 2014 are published in our annual [Marriages in England and Wales](#) release from the 2014 data year onwards.

## 4 . Quality summary

## Overview

[Civil partnership statistics](#) present data on civil partnership formations and dissolutions that took place in England and Wales between couples of the same sex. For the first time, these statistics also cover civil partnership formations and dissolutions that took place in England and Wales between couples of the opposite sex. Civil partnership formation statistics are produced by age, sex, previous marital status and area of formation. Civil partnership dissolution statistics are produced by age at dissolution, sex, and previous marital status. However, from the 2020 data year onwards, statistics are not available by age and previous marital status. Civil partnership dissolution statistics are only available for England and Wales as a whole; no subnational breakdown is possible. As civil partnerships among opposite-sex couples have only been possible since 31 December 2019, any dissolution statistics will be available in future publications.

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 enabled same-sex couples aged 16 years and over to obtain legal recognition of their relationship. The first day that couples could form a partnership was 21 December 2005 in England and Wales. A small number of civil partnerships were formed under special arrangements before these dates.

Coverage of the [annual civil partnership statistics](#) was altered from UK to England and Wales only from the 2014 data year onwards. This alteration comes after respondents to the [civil partnership consultation](#) almost unanimously supported the proposal for changing coverage to allow for more timely civil partnership statistics for England and Wales. Summary figures for the UK are published in [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#).

Marriage between same-sex couples has only been possible in England and Wales since 29 March 2014. Statistics on marriages of same-sex couples are published separately in our annual [Marriages in England and Wales](#) release from the 2014 data year onwards. Following the introduction of marriage for same-sex couples it remains possible for same-sex couples to choose to form a civil partnership instead.

Same-sex couples have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage and individuals in a marriage or a civil partnership have been able to change their gender without first needing to divorce or dissolve the civil partnership since 10 December 2014. These conversions are not included in our annual marriage statistics but are reported separately.

The consultation [Civil Partnerships: Next Steps and Consultation on Conversion](#), which ran from 10 July 2019 to 20 August 2019, set out plans to introduce opposite-sex civil partnerships. The consultation also asked about conversion between marriage and civil partnership, and vice versa. Views were sought on whether opposite-sex married couples should similarly have an opportunity to convert their relationship to a civil partnership. The Government Equalities Office (GEO) will publish a response to this consultation in due course. The outcome of that response may impact the civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics we produce in the future.

The [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc.\) Act 2019](#) made provision for the extension of civil partnerships to couples who are not of the same sex. The first civil partnership formations between couples of the opposite sex took place on 31 December 2019 and are included in our civil partnership statistics for 2020.

The GEO has published a [Marriage and civil partnership table](#) that sets out the similarities and differences between marriage and civil partnerships in England and Wales.

## Uses and users of civil partnership in England and Wales data

Civil partnership statistics are widely used to inform policy development. For example:

- The [Government Equalities Office \(GEO\)](#) takes the lead on civil partnership policy and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality, and civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics are used to inform policy making. The GEO monitors data on civil partnership statistics for future policy considerations.
- The [Department for Work and Pensions \(DWP\)](#) has used civil partnership, marriage and divorce data in dynamic simulation models covering pension-age populations to model pensioner incomes, as well as entitlement to state pensions and pension-age benefits. This involves modelling whole life courses, including the formation of partnerships (marriage, civil partnership and cohabitation) and dissolution of the same partnerships.
- The [Government Actuary's Department \(GAD\)](#) has used civil partnership data to estimate the cost of requiring pension schemes to equalise benefits for same-sex partners with opposite-sex partners. On occasion GAD are asked to provide estimates of costs in relation to pension schemes (often for government departments). In the absence of pension scheme data, our statistics are often used to inform the assumption setting process.

Other uses and users include:

- Academics and researchers, for example [Relate](#), use marriage, divorce and civil partnership data for research into family change and assessing the implications of partnership trends for care, the impact on childbearing, housing, and finances in later life or old age.
- Lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law use marriage, divorce and civil partnership data to comment on trends in case law; they also use these data to predict likely future trends in legal business, such as divorce cases, inheritance and [family law](#).
- Businesses involved in marriages or civil partnerships, such as hotels, catering businesses, bridal shops, wedding planners and civil partnership celebration planners, use marriage and civil partnership statistics by area to assess their market share of business and for marketing and commercial planning.
- Organisations covering gay and lesbian rights and equality issues, for example, [Stonewall](#), use civil partnership statistics to support their campaigns and pass on the data to their own users. The [Centre for Social Justice](#) regularly publishes reports on family policy which use our marriage, divorce or civil partnership figures.

## 5 . Quality characteristics of the civil partnerships in England and Wales data

### Relevance

(The degree to which statistical outputs meet users' needs.)

Our civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics report figures for a calendar year. A time series of the statistics is also reported, some of which go back to 2005 when civil partnerships were first introduced for same-sex couples.

Civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics, including marriage and divorce statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), are used widely to:

- report on social and demographic trends
- analyse and report on trends following policy change, for example the uptake of marriages of same-sex couples and the impact on civil partnership formations
- perform further analyses, for example comparing trends in divorce with civil partnership dissolutions

More detail about uses and users of civil partnership statistics can be found in Section 4 of this document.

## Accuracy and reliability

(The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.)

Our civil partnership formation statistics use data taken directly from the Registration Online (RON) system. The RON entry is the legal record for a civil partnership. The General Register Office (GRO) maintains the system and ensures that all civil partnerships that have taken place are entered onto RON, the data on the records are complete, and any amendments are updated on the system. A superintendent registrar quality assures registered civil partnerships for each quarter. It is therefore the most complete dataset available for civil partnership formations in England and Wales.

Once we extract an annual formations dataset, a number of quality assurance checks are performed. These include frequency checks and comparisons with previous years' data, as well as a check for duplicates. Checks are also carried out to look for inconsistencies within the dataset to ensure there are minimal internal errors, and statistical analysis is used to look at trends in the figures by registration authority over time.

Once the dataset for formations has been extracted and quality assured, anything which looks unusual is reported back to the GRO for further investigation. Any issues are resolved before the dataset is finalised.

Civil partnership dissolution data are extracted from the HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) FamilyMan and Core Case Data (CCD) case management systems and sent to us monthly. We conduct quality assurance tasks on the data throughout the year in preparation for the release of annual figures. These include:

- completeness checks, to ensure all dissolution records have been received from HMCTS
- consistency checks within the dataset to ensure minimal internal errors
- frequency checks and comparisons with previous years' data

## Output quality trade-offs

(Trade-offs are the extent to which different dimensions of quality are balanced against each other.)

There are sometimes blank fields in the dissolution records, in particular missing age and previous marital status. Prior to the 2013 data year, we used the corresponding formation record to obtain the missing data fields where possible, as it would have taken time to collect the missing data from individual courts. For the 2013 to 2019 data years, any missing age or previous legal status is shown in published tables as "not stated". Any calculations based on age for these years exclude these records.

From the 2020 data year onwards, information about the age and previous marital status of dissolving civil partners is not available as it is no longer collected during the dissolution process. Our published data tables, which previously presented statistics by age and marital status, therefore do not show this information for the 2020 data year.

## Coherence and comparability

(Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain, for example, geographic level.)

A time series of civil partnership formation and dissolution data for couples of the same sex is available on a comparable basis back to 2005 for formations and 2007 for dissolutions. This is the first time that statistics have been published for civil partnership formations for couples of the opposite-sex, and dissolution statistics will be published in future years.

The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) was introduced for the whole of the UK, making the statistics from the different countries within the UK comparable. We publish statistics for the whole of the UK with breakdowns for each constituent country in [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#) facilitating comparisons.

Formation figures for England and Wales are based on date of formation (the date on which the civil partnership took place) whereas figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are based on date of registration (the date on which the civil partnership is registered by the registrar: this date may be the same as the date of formation or a slightly later date). The impact on statistics is negligible.

From the 2017 data year, mean and median ages at both formation and dissolution for England and Wales are based on integer (whole number) ages, that is, age as at last birthday, and are consistent with the calculation of these measures for marriage and divorce statistics published for England and Wales. Mean and median ages at formation had previously been calculated on the basis of full age, which includes the number of months, until 2016 and at dissolution until 2012. When using integer ages to calculate mean and median ages, the mean is calculated using integer ages plus 0.5 to estimate exact age, while medians are calculated by interpolating integer ages.

Civil partnership formation statistics are not directly comparable with survey estimates of the number of civil partners in England and Wales from household surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS), as they are estimates of the number of civil partners rather than the number of civil partnerships which took place during a particular year. The article [Civil Partnerships Five Years On \(PDF, 190.08 KB\)](#) compares estimates of the number of men and women living in a civil partnership derived from registration data, the LFS and the APS for 2006 to 2010.

## Accessibility and clarity

(Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.)

Our recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV and Excel. We also offer users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances, other software may be used, or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on our website but not produced by us, or referenced on our website but stored elsewhere, may vary. For further information please contact [Health.data@ons.gov.uk](mailto:Health.data@ons.gov.uk).

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the links below:

- [terms and conditions \(for data on the website\)](#)
- [accessibility](#)

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

## Timeliness and punctuality

(Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.)

Figures are published approximately eight to ten months after the reference year the data relate to.

The annual release of the civil partnership publication is announced on the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) at least four weeks before publication, and on [our own release calendar](#).

For more details on related releases, [our release calendar](#) provides 12 months' notice of release dates. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change. The reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

## Concepts and definitions

(Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output and a description of the classifications used in the output.)

The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) came into force on 5 December 2005 in the UK and enabled same-sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationship. The first day that couples could form a civil partnership in England and Wales was 21 December 2005 in England and Wales, although a small number of civil partnerships were formed under special arrangements before these dates.

Both partners registering a civil partnership must be over 16 and have lived in the same area of England and Wales for at least seven days. Two steps are needed to register a civil partnership:

- give notice of intention to register a civil partnership
- register the civil partnership

With the implementation of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) came legislation not only on the formation of civil partnerships for couples of the same sex but also on their dissolution. The only possible ground for dissolution of a civil partnership among couples of the same sex is that the partnership has broken down irretrievably. In order to establish irretrievable breakdown, the civil partner applying for the dissolution must satisfy the court of one or more of the following:



- behaviour by one civil partner which means that the other cannot reasonably be expected to live with them
- separation for two years with consent
- separation for five years
- desertion of one party by the other for a period of two years

Unlike divorce, adultery is not recognised as a ground for dissolution of a civil partnership as the legal definition of adultery is sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite-sex outside of marriage. However, unfaithfulness may be recognised as a form of unreasonable behaviour.

To obtain a civil partnership dissolution in England and Wales, a couple must have been in either a registered civil partnership or a recognised foreign relationship for 12 months. Annulments, which can take place any time after the formation ceremony, are included in the dissolution figures.

The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) received Royal Assent on 17 July 2013. The Act enabled same-sex couples to get married in England and Wales from 29 March 2014, either in a civil ceremony or on religious premises (provided that the religious organisation concerned agrees with the marriage being solemnised through a religious ceremony). From 10 December 2014, existing civil partners have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage. The Act does not remove the availability of civil partnerships for same-sex couples.

The [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc.\) Act 2019](#) received Royal Assent on 26 March 2019. In relation to civil partnerships, it now provides for opposite sex couples to register a civil partnership. The first of these took place on 31 December 2019.

## 6 . Methods used to produce the civil partnerships in England and Wales data

### How we collect the data and main data sources

Civil partnership formation statistics for England and Wales are based on information collected when a civil partnership is registered. Civil partnerships registered in England and Wales are recorded on the Registration Online (RON) system by registrars. All civil partnerships must be entered onto this system as it forms the legal record. These records are transferred daily from RON into our Life Events Continuity (LEC) database.

An extract of annual formations data (for the reference year the data relates to) is taken between April and June in the following year (for the reference year the statistics relate to). Civil partnership dissolutions which take place in England and Wales are recorded by the courts on the HM Courts and Tribunals Service's (HMCTS) FamilyMan and Core Case Data (CCD) case management systems, and extracts are sent to us electronically each month. Civil partnership dissolutions data for the 2021 data years onwards will be extracted solely from the CCD case management system. Prior to 2013, data for civil partnership dissolution statistics were taken from information provided on form D106 provided to us by the courts.

The latest available [population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#) are used in the calculation of civil partnership formation and dissolution rates. Formation and dissolution rates are also published for England and Wales (combined) in [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#).

## How we process, analyse, quality assure and validate the data

Quality assurance checks are conducted on the annual formations dataset extract taken. Any queries with the data are sent to the General Register Office (GRO) for investigation and records are amended where necessary. Once all checks have been completed and queries resolved, the annual tables for publication are created.

For dissolution data, checks are carried out quarterly and annually before the annual dataset is finalised. Any queries with the data are referred to HMCTS for investigation and records are amended where necessary. Once all checks have been completed and queries resolved, the annual tables for publication are created.

A very small number of civil partnership formation and dissolution records for England and Wales can be received after the date on which our annual dataset was taken. These records are not included in published figures. The impact of this is negligible.

## 7 . Other information

### Assessment of user needs and perceptions

(The processes for finding out about uses and users, and their views on the statistical products.)

We ran a public consultation on [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics for England and Wales](#) from 8 October 2013 to 17 December 2013. We published a report [summarising the consultation responses \(PDF 101KB\)](#).

We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of our releases and encourage users to send feedback via email to [Health.data@ons.gov.uk](mailto:Health.data@ons.gov.uk).

Feedback is requested with all emails sent by customer service teams within the Vital Statistics Output Branch. Feedback is also received through our regular attendance at user group meetings and conferences.

### Useful links

More data on [Civil partnerships in England and Wales](#) are available.

Annual civil partnership figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#).

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

[Scottish Government](#) provides civil partnership dissolution statistics for Scotland.

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

Further statistics on [marriages](#) (including marriages of same-sex couples) and [divorces](#), are available on our website, as are data on [families and households](#), including cohabitation figures.

[Population estimates by marital status](#) provide the estimated population by age group, sex and marital status (single, married, civil partnered, divorced, and widowed) for England and Wales.

The [Perspectives on civil partnerships and marriages in England and Wales](#) article considers the developments since the turn of the century in the provision of new options for same-sex and opposite-sex couples to formalise their unions with full legal recognition.