

# 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:  
Paula Guy  
[pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk)  
+44 1329 444661

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# 1 . Output information

National Statistic	
Survey name	Civil partnerships in England and Wales
Frequency	Annual
How compiled	Based on third-party data
Geographic coverage	England and Wales
Last revised	29 February 2024

## 2 . About this Quality and Methodology Information report

This Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) 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 in England and Wales, which are available back to 2005 for same-sex couples (introduced on 21 December 2005) and 2019 for opposite-sex couples (introduced on 31 December 2019).
- Civil partnership formations for residents of England and Wales that take place outside of England and Wales are not included, but formations between non-residents in England and Wales are included in our figures.
- Civil partnership dissolution statistics are derived from information recorded by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) during the dissolution process; for further details, see our [Civil partnership dissolutions dataset](#).
- Dissolutions where the civil partnership formation took place outside of England and Wales are included, provided the civil partnership was legally recognised in the UK and one of the parties had a permanent home in England and/or Wales.
- Our dissolution statistics for same-sex couples are available from 2007 and for opposite-sex couples from 2022; they do not include couples who separate but do not dissolve their civil partnership.
- Figures prior to 2022 represent both dissolutions and annulments that took place in England and Wales; [annulments](#) are where the marriage or civil partnership itself is void (that no valid marriage or civil partnership ever existed) or voidable (was legal at time of registration but is no longer legal); data for 2022 include annulments under the old law, but these are not available for new law cases (which came into effect from 6 April 2022).
- Dissolution statistics for 2022 were published on 22 February 2024, at the same time as figures on divorce were released; statistical commentary and analysis of 2022 dissolutions are available in our [Divorces in England and Wales: 2022 bulletin](#).
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publish regular [civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland](#).
- Civil partnership formation statistics are published regularly by the [National Records of Scotland](#), and Scottish Government publish civil partnership dissolution statistics as part of their [Civil justice statistics in Scotland](#).
- Statistics on [Marriages in England and Wales](#) and [Divorces in England and Wales](#) are published annually; marriages between same-sex couples have been possible in England and Wales since 29 March 2014 and divorces of same-sex couples since 2015.

## 4 . Quality summary

## Overview

[Civil partnership statistics](#) present data on civil partnership formations and dissolutions that took place in England and Wales. Civil partnership formation statistics are available for both same-sex couples (from 2005) and opposite-sex couples (from 2019) and are produced by age, sex, previous legal partnership status and area of formation.

Civil partnership dissolution statistics are presented for same-sex couples (from 2007) and opposite-sex couples (from 2022). Historically, same-sex dissolution tables were produced by age at the time of dissolution, sex, and legal partnership status at the time of formation. Since the 2020 calendar data year, information about age and previous legal partnership status is no longer collected as part of the dissolution process. Our data tables therefore do not include age and previous partnership status breakdowns for the 2020 data year onwards.

On 27 February 2023, [The Marriage and Civil Partnership \(minimum Age\) Act 2022](#) came into force, preventing those aged 16 and 17 years in England and Wales from marrying or entering into a civil partnership, even with parental consent. This change in law does not affect the latest civil partnership statistics available, which are for 2022. The legal minimum age for entering into a marriage or civil partnership remains 16 years for those in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) received Royal Assent on 25 June 2020 and came into effect on 6 April 2022. The Act revises the legal process in England and Wales for married couples to obtain a divorce or judicial separation, and for civil partners to dissolve their civil partnership or obtain a separation. The main changes to [The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) include:

- applicants can apply jointly for divorce, civil partnership dissolution, or judicial separation, as well as individually
- people who are married or in civil partnerships cannot state grounds for divorce, dissolution, or separation (also known as “facts”)
- applicants must now wait a minimum 20-week period from the start of proceedings until applying for the conditional order

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 2019 onwards.

The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) came into force on 5 December 2005 in the UK; the first day same-sex 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 statistical data](#) was altered from UK to England and Wales only from the 2014 data year onwards. This alteration came after respondents to our [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 our [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages dataset \(Excel, 483.0KB\)](#).

Marriage between same-sex couples has 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 data](#) 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.

Since 10 December 2014, same-sex couples have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage. These conversions are not included in our marriage figures, as these are based on registrations only, but they are reported separately as conversions within Table 13 of our [Marriages in England and Wales dataset](#). It is currently not possible for a couple in an opposite-sex marriage to convert their marriage to a civil partnership.

The Government Equalities Office (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 [GEO](#) takes the lead on the Equality Act 2010, including on gender, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in government. Civil partnership and marriage statistics are used to inform policy making.

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 in the past to estimate the cost of requiring pension schemes to equalise benefits for same-sex civil partners with opposite-sex married 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, such as [Relate](#), use marriage, divorce and civil partnership data for research into family change, as well as 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 and dissolution cases, inheritance and [family law](#)
- businesses involved in marriages or civil partnerships, such as hotels, catering businesses, bridal shops, wedding 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 use civil partnership and marriage 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

This section provides a range of information that describes the quality and characteristics of the civil partnership formations and dissolutions data and identifies issues that should be noted when using the output.

### Relevance

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

Our civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics report figures for a calendar year. Time series of the statistics are 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, and 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 the Quality Summary section of this QMI.

## **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 the 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 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 dissolution data for the 2021 data year onwards are extracted solely from the CCD case management system. We conduct quality assurance checks 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 the 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. Before 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 people dissolving civil partnerships 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, do not show this information for the 2020 data year onwards.

On 6 April 2022, the [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) came into effect. Any applications made under this new legislation do not include grounds for divorce or dissolution.

## **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. Civil partnership formations for couples of the opposite-sex are available back to 2019, and dissolution statistics from 2022 onwards.

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

Formation figures for England and Wales are based on date of formation (the date on which the civil partnership took place). 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.

Following the introduction of [The Marriage and Civil Partnership \(minimum Age\) Act 2022](#), which came into effect on 27 February 2023, the minimum age a person can now get married or enter into a civil partnership in England or Wales is aged 18 years. This change will be reflected in our data from 2023 onwards. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the minimum age a person can get married or enter into a civil partnership remains aged 16 years.

From the 2017 data year, Table 4 of our [Civil partnership formations dataset](#) shows mean and median ages at formation for England and Wales based on integer (whole number) ages. This is also the case for dissolutions from 2017 to 2019 (this information is not available from 2020 onwards). This means that it is the age as of last birthday that is recorded, and is 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). This is because surveys provide estimates of the number of civil partners in the population, rather than the number of civil partnerships which took place during a particular year. Our [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales bulletin](#) provides the latest estimates of the number of civil partners resident in England and Wales based on the mid-year population estimates and Labour Force Survey data.

## **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).

Following guidance from the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to improve digital accessibility of statistical spreadsheets, our published datasets for civil partnership statistics from the 2020 data year onwards now include and follow this guidance. This is to help improve the usability, accessibility and machine readability of our statistical spreadsheets.

Our recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, as well as 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 [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@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 rates](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to the Demographic Analysis Unit via email at [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk) or telephone: +44 1329 444661. User-requested data [related to marriage, co-habitation and 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 usually published approximately eight to ten months after the reference year to which the data relate.

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 notice of upcoming 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, although a small number of civil partnerships were formed under special arrangements before these dates.

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 2019 onwards.

The [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#) received Royal Assent in April 2022 and came into effect on 27 February 2023. From this date, the minimum age of marriage and civil partnership in England and Wales is aged 18 years. Prior to this date it was possible for those aged 16 and 17 years to marry or enter into a civil partnership with parental or judicial consent.

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. Prior to 6 April 2022, a civil partnership could be dissolved on the ground that the partnership had broken down irretrievably, relying on one or more of the following facts:

- 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

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

The [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) received Royal Assent on 25 June 2020 and came into effect on 6 April 2022. The Act revises the legal process in England and Wales for married couples to obtain a divorce or judicial separation, and for civil partners to dissolve their civil partnership or obtain a separation. It therefore amends certain provisions set out in the [Matrimonial Causes Act 1973](#) and the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), which are the main statutes governing these proceedings. [The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) removed the requirement to establish facts. Either or both parties to a marriage or civil partnership may now apply to the court for a divorce or dissolution order which dissolves the marriage or civil partnership on the ground that the marriage or civil partnership has broken down irretrievably.

To obtain a civil partnership dissolution in England and Wales, a couple must have been in a registered civil partnership for at least 12 months. Couples who formed their civil partnership abroad can obtain a dissolution in England and Wales as long as their partnership is legally recognised in the UK, and one of the parties has a permanent home in England and/or Wales. Annulments, which can take place any time after the formation ceremony, are included in the dissolution figures for applications made prior to the introduction of The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020. Annulments under the new law are currently not included.

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 same-sex 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.

## **Geography**

Civil partnership formation statistics include formations that have taken place in England and Wales. Further breakdowns are provided for England and Wales separately and by registration district. Our registration district tables are presented using the geographic boundaries in place as at April of the latest year for which data are being reported. For Wales, registration districts are coterminous with unitary authority boundaries. For England, registration districts equate to a subset of regions, counties, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities.

Civil partnership dissolution statistics are presented for England and Wales as a whole; no subnational breakdown is available.

## **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 relate to) is taken between April and June in the following year (for the reference year to which the statistics relate). 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 dissolution data for the 2021 data years onwards are extracted solely from the CCD case management system. Before 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 our [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages bulletin](#). Revised civil partnership formation and dissolution rates were published for 2012 to 2021 alongside the latest 2022 data. This was to incorporate revised population estimates by marital status for 2012 to 2021 to align with Census 2021 results.

## **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 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 [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk).

Feedback is requested with all emails sent by the Stakeholder Engagement Team within Demography.

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

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

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

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

Further [marriage statistics](#) and [divorce statistics](#) 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 legal partnership status 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.

## 8 . Cite this QMI

Office for National Statistics (ONS), last revised 29 February 2024, ONS website, [Civil Partnerships in England and Wales QMI](#)