

User guide to marriage statistics

Supporting information on the data used in our published marriage tables, which provide statistics on marriages that took place in England and Wales during the latest available data year.

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1 . Introduction

We produce demographic statistics on marriages taking place in England and Wales, which are published as [accredited official statistics](#). This guarantees that these outputs have been produced to high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and have been produced free from any political interference.

Our [Marriage statistics](#) are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement. Final annual marriage statistics for 2022 were published earlier than usual following the introduction of the [Marriages, Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration Etc.\) Act 2019](#) (which came into force on 4 May 2021).

It was previously only possible to publish final annual marriage statistics around 26 months after the end of the reference year. This was because of delays in the paper submission of religious marriage entries by the clergy and authorised persons. An electronic registration system has now replaced the paper marriage register and is expected to reduce the delay in submission of religious marriage entries.

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. Final marriage statistics are required to be laid before Parliament.

Published tables provide statistics on marriages that took place in England and Wales. From the 2013 data year onwards, the format of annual marriage publications changed. We now publish a selection of summary datasets, which provide an extensive time series for comparison. Alongside these, we also publish [explorable datasets \(published on the Nomis website\)](#), which can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for a particular calendar year. A consultation, [Understanding user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics given the introduction of marriage of same-sex couples \(docx, 181KB\)](#), was published in October 2013. The [response to this consultation \(PDF, 103.7KB\)](#), published in April 2014, detailed these changes.

Prior to the 2012 data year, final marriage statistics for the previous year were published as a set of packages:

- [Number of marriages, marriage rates and period of occurrence](#)
- [Previous marital status](#)
- [Age and previous marital status at marriage](#)
- [Marriage statistics, cohabitation and cohort analyses](#)
- [Marriages by area of occurrence, type of ceremony and denomination](#)

Comparable statistics for England and Wales for earlier years are published as follows:

- 1995 to 2007 in [Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics](#) (series FM2)
- 1974 to 1994 in the annual reference volume Marriage and divorce statistics (series FM2)
- prior to 1974 in the Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales

Historical statistics for England and Wales have also been published in the volume Marriage and divorce statistics (Series FM2 Number 16) published in 1990. This covers the period 1837 to 1983 for marriages, dating from the year when the present national system of registration was first introduced in England and Wales. The majority of these figures are now included in published tables.

Annual marriage figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in our [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages dataset](#). The [National Records of Scotland](#) (NRS) publish [marriage statistics for Scotland](#). The [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) (NISRA) publish [marriage statistics for Northern Ireland](#).

Organisations such as [Eurostat](#) and the [United Nations Statistics Division](#) use our marriage statistics; for example, to monitor progress towards global indicators as part of the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Our [Marriages in England and Wales Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#) contains more information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how they compare with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

2 . Legislation and procedures

Legislation

Legally, couples getting married can choose either a civil or religious ceremony. Before the marriage, certain legal procedures must have taken place, the forms of which vary. Following the introduction of the electronic registration system, all marriages are now registered by a registration officer within 21 days of a marriage.

The existing provisions for the preliminaries to, and registration of, marriages and civil partnerships and the processing, reporting and analysis of relevant data appear in different legislation. This reflects the distinct and separate roles of the [Registrar General for England and Wales](#) and the [UK Statistics Authority](#).

The Registrar General is guided by the following legislation.

The Marriage Acts

Marriage legislation is complex and is governed by the Ecclesiastical Licences Act 1533, the [Marriage Act 1949](#) and the [Marriage \(Registrar General's Licence\) Act 1970](#). There were two major amendments to the [Marriage Act 1949](#), which widened the places in which marriages may take place.

The [Marriage Act 1983](#) enabled marriages of house-bound and detained persons to be conducted at the place where they reside.

The [Marriage Act 1994](#) made provision for civil marriages to be conducted in any register office or venue approved by the local council such as stately homes or hotels (approved premises).

Although the [Marriage Act 1994](#) allowed couples to form civil marriages in any registration district, it did not affect the restrictions of religious marriages in registered buildings. They could only take place outside the registration district(s) of residence if the registered building was the usual place of worship of either or both parties, or it was the nearest registered building to the registration district(s) of residence in which they could marry, according to their desired rites and ceremonies.

Changes to the law ([Church of England Marriage Measure 2008](#) and the [Marriage \(Wales\) Act 2010](#)) made it easier for couples to marry in a Church of England church, even if they do not live in the parish. Previously, couples wanting to marry outside their parish had to obtain a special licence or attend the church regularly for six months and go on the electoral roll. Since 1 October 2008, couples have been able to marry in a church where they have a family or other special connection, even if they do not live there. A similar change came into force for the Church in Wales from 18 March 2010.

The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) made provision for the marriage of same-sex couples in England and Wales, either in a civil ceremony or on religious premises (provided that the religious organisation concerned agrees with the marriage being conducted through a religious ceremony). The first same-sex weddings took place from Saturday 29 March 2014. Where either of the couple was seriously ill and not expected to recover or was being deployed overseas in the armed forces to a war zone, marriages were allowed to take place without the 15-day notice period. Such marriages of same-sex couples were therefore possible from Thursday 13 March 2014. Same-sex civil partners have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage, if they so desired, from 10 December 2014. Opposite-sex couples are currently unable to convert their civil partnership into a marriage.

The [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc\) Act 2019](#) came into effect on 26 May 2019. This provided for opposite-sex couples to enter into civil partnerships in England and Wales from 31 December 2019. It also provided for changes to the way marriages are registered by ensuring that the couple arrange to have the Marriage Document prepared by the officiator within seven days of the date of the wedding and for the name of the mother of each party to be added to marriage registers (where previously only the fathers' names were recorded).

The [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#), which raises the legal age of marriage and civil partnership to 18 years in England and Wales, received Royal Assent in April 2022 and came into effect on 27 February 2023. This will be reflected in marriage data for 2023 onwards. The purpose of the Act is to address the practice of child marriage in England and Wales. This brings an end to provisions allowing for those aged 16 to 17 years to marry or enter a civil partnership with parental or judicial consent.

The effect of this change is that any marriages that take place overseas, or in Scotland or Northern Ireland, involving those aged under 18 years, where one of the parties is usually resident in England and Wales, will not be legally recognised in England and Wales. This change in recognition also applies to civil partnerships. This does not affect the validity of any marriages or civil partnerships entered into before the Act came into force.

The Act also makes it illegal for a person to arrange the marriage or civil partnership of a person aged under 18 years in England and Wales in those circumstances where that is not already illegal.

The Immigration Acts

The [Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#) amended the [Marriage Act 1949](#). It required that notice of marriage be given in person by each of the parties to the marriage, where formerly it had been possible for notice of marriage to be given by one person on behalf of both. It abolished marriage by superintendent registrar's certificate with licence and reduced the waiting period for marriage on the authority of superintendent registrar's certificate (without licence) required to be obtained by both parties to 15 days (instead of 21 days). Finally, it amended the [Marriage Act 1949](#) to give registration officers the power to require documentary evidence of name, age, marital status and nationality from the person giving notice. Additionally, Section 24 of the [Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#) placed a statutory duty on registration officers to report to the Home Office any marriage they suspect is being contracted for the purpose of evading immigration control.

Prior to 9 May 2011, under the [Asylum and Immigration \(Treatment of Claimants, etc.\) Act 2004](#), any migrant who was already in the UK and subject to immigration control was required to apply for a Certificate of Approval before they could get married or register a civil partnership in England and Wales (unless they were getting married within the Anglican Church). The Certificate of Approval scheme was introduced in February 2005 as part of a package of measures designed to deter persons from entering into marriages of convenience ("sham marriages") for immigration purposes. The scheme required both parties to satisfy certain qualifying conditions and notice of the proposed marriage could only be given at a designated register office, which both parties had to attend together.

The Certificate of Approval scheme was removed on 9 May 2011. Entering into a sham marriage does not entitle migrants to any right to remain in the UK. The Home Office continued to investigate suspected abuse with assistance from registrars and members of the clergy, disrupting marriages where possible, before they take place. From April 2011, where either of the people marrying was a non-European Economic Area (EEA) national, the Church's guidance stated that the clergy should not offer to publish banns and should instead direct the couple to apply for a Common Licence.

The marriage and civil partnership referral and investigation scheme came into effect from 2 March 2015, ([Part 4 of the Immigration Act 2014](#)). This means all proposed marriages and civil partnerships in the UK involving a person who is not a relevant national with limited or no immigration status in the UK, or who does not provide specified evidence that they are exempt from the scheme, are referred to the Home Office by the registration officer. In addition to this, any registration officer who suspects a sham marriage at any point can electronically report their suspicions to the Home Office. Section 62(1) of the 2014 Act includes the definition of a "relevant national".

The UK Statistics Authority is guided by the following two Acts.

The [Registration Service Act 1953](#): Section 19 requires the UK Statistics Authority to produce annual abstracts of the number of live births, stillbirths, deaths and marriages.

The [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#): (the 2007 Act) transferred some of the statistical functions of the Registrar General, including the production of an annual abstract, to the UK Statistics Authority and we became the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority. The [2007 Act](#) also provides the Registrar General with a power to disclose any information entered in a marriage register or recorded about a civil partnership to the UK Statistics Authority for statistical purposes. It also enables the UK Statistics Authority to produce and publish statistics relating to any matter regarding the UK.

The [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#) and accompanying machinery of government changes came into force on 1 April 2008, and ended the arrangement whereby the National Statistician was concurrently the Registrar General for England and Wales. At the same time, the General Register Office (GRO) ceased being part of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and was moved to the Identity and Passport Service, which was renamed [HM Passport Office](#) on 13 May 2013. The Statistics Board is the legal successor to ONS and undertakes the former statistical functions of the Registrar General. The responsibility for the production of marriage and civil partnership statistics is now a function of the UK Statistics Authority.

Preliminary investigations

In satisfying themselves that the parties are free to marry, superintendent registrars may need to examine documents that support the parties' declared legal partnership status. If a party states they are divorced, the registrar may wish to examine the final order or decree that made the dissolution of the previous marriage or civil partnership absolute; if a party says their previous legal partner has died, the registrar may want to see the death certificate or some other satisfactory evidence of death.

Before 27 February 2023, persons aged 16 or 17 years who had not previously married or entered a civil partnership were able to enter a legal partnership with the consent of each parent (if any) who has parental responsibility, or guardian (if any) or, if there is a custody, residence or care order in force, of the persons named in the order. In certain circumstances the necessity of obtaining consent can be dispensed with by the courts, the Registrar General, or the superintendent registrar. A marriage contracted in England and Wales between persons either of whom is under the age of 16 years is void. A person who has a living legal partner (either by marriage or civil partnership) cannot contract a marriage. A marriage is void if it is contracted between parties who are related to each other within a defined list of relationships – for example, a brother may not marry his sister.

From 27 February 2023, the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 came into effect. This act raised the age of marriage and civil partnership to 18 in England and Wales. This means that people aged 16 to 17 years are no longer able to marry or enter a civil partnership under any circumstances, including with parental or judicial consent from this date. This will affect marriages from 2023 onwards.

Giving notice of marriage

In England and Wales, a marriage may take place in a church of the Church of England or the Church in Wales after giving ecclesiastical notice or after certain civil procedures. Any other marriage must be preceded by civil procedures. For a marriage according to the rites of the Church of England or Church in Wales, the alternatives are:

- the publication of banns
- the issue of a common licence
- the issue of a special licence granted by, or on behalf of, the Archbishop of Canterbury
- the issue of a superintendent registrar's certificate

Banns must be published on three Sundays preceding the marriage. A common licence removes the need for publication of banns and enables couples to marry without delay. It is granted by the Church of England or Church in Wales authorities. A special licence is issued only in exceptional circumstances. It enables a marriage to take place according to the rites of the Church of England or Church in Wales at any time and place, for example, in an unlicensed chapel or hospital.

For marriage by superintendent registrar's certificate, one or both of the parties to the marriage must have lived in a registration district in England and Wales for at least seven days immediately before giving notice of intention to marry. Each party must give their own notice, in person, to the superintendent registrar of the registration district in which they reside. This does not have to be done on the same day. After giving notice of intention to marry, there is a further 29-day waiting period before the marriage may take place. The marriage may take place up to one year from the date that notice was given. Under the provisions of the [Marriage \(Registrar General's Licence\) Act 1970](#), where one of the parties is seriously ill, not expected to recover and cannot be moved to a place of marriage, the Registrar General can issue a licence for a marriage to take place anywhere without delay. Only one notice of marriage is given, and the licence is valid for a month.

Procedures

There are two distinct procedures for marriage in England and Wales. Marriage may take place according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England or the Church in Wales, and in all but a few cases this will be after giving ecclesiastical notice. All other marriages must be preceded by giving civil notice. All religious marriages, with the exception of marriages that take place according to the rites of the Society of Friends, those professing the Jewish religion, marriages of those who are housebound and detained, and marriages by Registrar General's licence, must take place in buildings registered for the purpose.

Registration

In most cases the marriage is registered immediately after the ceremony. From May 2021, a new electronic system applies to all marriages taking place in England and Wales, and is the responsibility of a registration officer to complete within 21 days of the marriage.

Prior to May 2021, in churches and other buildings of the Church of England or the Church in Wales, a marriage was registered by a member of the clergy in duplicate registers.

In registered buildings, the marriage was registered, either by a registrar in their own register, or by an authorised person in duplicate registers supplied for the registered building. An authorised person was not necessarily the person who conducted the ceremony. In register offices and approved premises, the marriage took place in the presence of a superintendent registrar and a registrar who carried out the registration. Jewish marriages were registered by the secretary (for marriages) of a synagogue; where parties were members of different synagogues this would be whichever of those synagogues the couple nominated. Marriages according to the rites and ceremonies of the Society of Friends were registered by the registering officer of the monthly meeting in which the marriage took place. In both these cases, marriages needed to be registered as soon as possible after they had taken place.

Religious marriages other than those that take place according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, Church in Wales, Society of Friends or of the Jewish religion must usually take place in a building registered for marriages. For a building to be certified as a place of worship, the principal use of the building must be for religious worship.

3 . Information collected

Marriage statistics are based on details collected in the marriage register. Historically, the majority of the details were supplied by the couple to the person registering the marriage. This person may have been a member of the clergy, an authorised person for a religious marriage, a secretary of a synagogue, a registering officer of the Society of Friends or a civil registrar.

Prior to 2011, marriage entries were collated by registrars in the registration district where they occurred. The entries were then sent to the General Register Office (GRO) for the compilation of central records and indexes in the month following the end of each quarter. Certified copies of each completed marriage entry appearing in the marriage register (both civil and religious) were also sent to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by GRO on a regular basis. Once received, the forms were entered onto ONS systems and verified. Examples of marriage forms used for civil and religious marriages are reproduced in [Appendix A](#).

From January 2011, all marriages registered within England and Wales have been recorded on the web-based Registration Online system (RON). Civil marriages are entered onto RON by registrars within seven days of the marriage. The majority of religious marriages each year are in the Church of England or Church in Wales.

Returns from churches continued to be in paper format until May 2021. Local registrars co-ordinated the receipt of paper returns for these marriages, including issuing reminders to the churches in the month following the end of each quarter. GRO, however, were very much reliant on the local registrars, who in turn were reliant on the clergy and authorised persons in this respect.

The information from the paper copies was entered onto RON at GRO providing a means of issuing certified copies electronically and allowing statistical data to be extracted. From 4 May 2021, marriages were no longer registered in paper format, though some late returns may still be in paper format. Marriage details are now captured on a marriage document, by the clergy, which are registered on the electronic marriage register, by the registrar, at the local register office no later than 21 days after the ceremony.

Prior to May 2021 around 4% of religious marriage returns remained outstanding one year after the end of the reference period (this is based on marriage records received at the ONS); this directly affected the timing of statistical outputs. This may be because of a number of factors such as the closure of a building or change of incumbent. An electronic system has been introduced to track returns from every building in which marriages may take place. This provides data that enables GRO to identify potential outstanding returns and take targeted action via the local registrar. In addition, GRO has also improved communications with all denominations via a regular newsletter covering a range of topics including the importance of providing the timely return of copies of marriage records. The timeliness of returns should improve following the introduction of the [Marriages, Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration Etc.\) Act 2019](#), which came into force on 4 May 2021.

Marriage data recorded on RON is then passed onto the ONS for statistical purposes. We perform regular receipt and diagnostic tests resulting in contact with GRO to resolve any issues identified.

The data analysed in the tables are summarised in this section.

Supplied by the couple:

- legal partnership status (prior to marriage) is recorded as a condition in the marriage entry
- age at marriage (in years) is provided by both partners

Details of usual residence of each partner at the time of marriage are recorded in the marriage entry. The information is not used for geographic analyses of marriages because the addresses given are not necessarily the same as the long-term addresses before marriage, or the same as the residence of the couple after marriage.

Prior to May 2021, the names and occupations of each partner, and the names and occupations of each partner's father only, were also recorded in the marriage entry. Occupation is collected but not coded and therefore we cannot provide marriage statistics by occupation. From 4 May 2021, each partner is able to record the details of up to four parents on the marriage document (for example, mothers, fathers or stepparents).

Supplied by the person(s) performing and registering the marriage:

- date of marriage
- place of marriage
- area of occurrence
- the person(s) by, or before, whom the marriage took place and was registered
- giving notice to marriage

The place of marriage, when a person is seriously ill and not expected to recover or is housebound, could be the name of a hospital or hospice, or possibly a private address. With a detained person, only the private postal address of the establishment is given, that would not indicate a prison or psychiatric hospital if they do not want this recorded.

The area of occurrence is the registration district in which the marriage took place, although there may be rare exceptions. This may not be the district in which the couple reside, either before or after marriage. All geographic analyses of marriages are based on area of occurrence, not area of residence.

Derived from the marriage entry:

- type of religious ceremony (denomination) – derived from the place of marriage, since 2011 this has been received on the marriage record
- civil marriages, location type is classified in one of the following categories: in a register office; registrar registering a civil marriage in a building other than a register office or approved premises, but not in a registered building; and in an approved premise

Up until 2011, an indicator was used to show whether or not the couple gave the same address at marriage. From 2011, it has only been possible to provide estimates of the percentage of couples cohabiting prior to marriage. This is because the indicator is created using both the partners' postcodes. Where the postcodes match, it is assumed that the couple were cohabiting prior to marriage. Around 4% of marriage records are missing either one or both postcodes; these records are therefore excluded when producing the cohabitation estimate. Research has shown that this is a reasonably good proxy variable for pre-marital cohabitation.

From 2011, we have used a lookup function to code records where previous marital status or type of ceremony recorded on the marriage entry is equal to "other" when received, but text fields providing further information show that the previous marital status or type of ceremony should actually be coded to one of the existing values available.

Some couples choose to get married elsewhere. There is no legal requirement for those marriages of persons usually resident in England and Wales, but which took place outside England and Wales, to be registered by the GRO. However, some overseas marriages are recorded with the overseas section at GRO. These fall into two main types: marriages of armed forces personnel and marriages that take place in certain UK consulates that offer a consular marriage service (there are around 30 consulates that have this facility). In total there are approximately 40 consulates that offer either a consular marriage, civil partnership or civil partnership to marriage conversion service, with a number of these offering more than one of these facilities.

It is possible to estimate the number of UK residents marrying abroad and the number of overseas residents marrying in the UK using data from the [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\)](#). These estimates are based on visits of less than 12 months and are derived from interviews conducted at the end of visits, where the main reason for visit was marriage. These estimates are based on a very small number of IPS interviews and so the standard errors on the estimates are correspondingly high.

In 2022, an estimated 84,000 UK residents went abroad to get married and an estimated 11,000 overseas residents married in the UK. This represents an increase compared with pre-coronavirus levels in 2019, when 71,000 UK residents were estimated to have married abroad, and 7,000 overseas residents were estimated to have married in the UK.

Under the [Forced Marriage \(Civil Protection\) Act 2007](#), where a forced marriage has or is about to take place, courts will be able to make orders to protect the victim or the potential victim and help remove them from that situation. We do not produce any statistics on forced marriages.

4 . Accuracy of information

The information in the marriage entry is largely supplied by the persons being married, who are responsible for its accuracy. Supplying false information may render them liable to prosecution for perjury hence the information supplied is generally believed to be correct. There is no routine statistical verification of the data, although editing checks are carried out to detect clerical, coding and keying errors. However, certain corrections subsequently come to light and are notified and recorded by the General Register Office (GRO).

Each year a certain number of marriages are not included in the final figures because the entries have been received later than the date on which the annual dataset is taken. Table 1 shows the differences between the number of marriages stored on our database and the number included in final marriages publications each year. The differences reflect the marriage records that we receive after the date that the annual dataset is taken. Although this means some marriages are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise that must be taken in order to publish more timely data.

Table 1: Marriages not included in the published data
England and Wales, 2000 to 2021

Year of marriage Database¹ Published tables Difference

2000	268,772	267,961	811
2001	250,676	249,227	1,449
2002	256,356	255,596	760
2003	271,055	270,109	946
2004	273,900	273,069	831
2005	248,868	247,805	1,063
2006	240,253	239,454	799
2007	236,248	235,367	881
2008	236,526	235,794	732
2009	233,281	232,443	838
2010	244,575	243,808	767
2011	250,353	249,133	1,220
2012	264,575	263,640	935
2013	242,286	240,854	1,432
2014	253,507	252,222	1,285
2015	246,782	245,513	1,269
2016	250,835	249,793	1,042
2017	243,516	242,842	674
2018	235,319	234,795	524
2019*	221,093	219,850	1243
2020*	86,141	85,770	371
2021*	207,718	207,708	10

Source: Office for National Statistics – Marriages in England and Wales

Notes

1. * Counts taken in April 2024

5 . Missing information and corrections

Prior to the 2011 data year, if the age of either of the parties was not given, a value for that age based upon the other party's stated age was assigned, taking into account the combined marital status of the parties. Where the ages of both parties were missing, the values assigned were those of the previous couple having the same pair of marital statuses. Few records required such imputation each year. Any other relevant item of information that appeared to be omitted was queried and corrected where appropriate.

From the 2011 data year onwards, missing values for age at marriage have not been assigned to a valid age. The small numbers of missing values over recent years mean that imputation adds no significant value to the dataset. Some records also contain missing values for area of occurrence. Published tables now include information on the small number of records for which information is missing.

Table 2: Level of imputation required for age at marriage variable
England and Wales, 2000 to 2010

Year of marriage	Age of husband and/or wife
2000	11 records
2001	8 records
2002	11 records
2003	12 records
2004	11 records
2005	9 records
2006	10 records
2007	20 records
2008	12 records
2009	4 records
2010	8 records

Source: Office for National Statistics

Prior to the 2014 data year, a very small number of records were missing information on the previous marital status for one or both partners. In these cases, it was assumed that these persons were never married or civil partnered. From the 2014 data year onwards, published tables now include information on the small number of records for which information on previous legal partnership status is missing.

6 . General notes

Coverage

The marriages analysed are those that took place in England and Wales in each calendar year. Late notifications of marriage entries are not included in annual tables but are retained on our database (see Table 1).

Base populations

The population figures used to calculate rates are [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for England and Wales](#).

The population estimates used are the most up to date when rates are published. Our [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements Quality and Methodology Information report](#) provides more detail on the methodology for producing the estimates that have been published since July 2015.

Area analyses

Marriage entries are collated by registrars in the registration district where they occur. This means that area analysis is only possible by registration district or by aggregation of the data from these districts. Marriage statistics are published by registration district of occurrence. Boundary changes mean that figures are not always comparable over time.

Marriage statistics by type of ceremony

Religious marriages other than those taking place according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, Church in Wales, Society of Friends or of the Jewish religion must usually take place in a building registered for marriages. All buildings registered for marriage must also be certified as a place of worship. Marriage statistics by religion need to be interpreted with caution as some religious marriage ceremonies (for example, Muslim and Sikh) can take place at unregistered premises. To be registered as a legal marriage the couple have a further marriage ceremony in a registry office or approved building. Such weddings are coded as civil marriages because only the civil marriage certificate is received.

Given that marriage statistics by religion can be misinterpreted for some religions, we publish religious marriages to opposite-sex couples under the following groupings:

- Church of England and Church in Wales
- Catholic
- other Christian denominations (includes Methodist, Calvinistic Methodist, United Reformed Church, Congregationalist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Society of Friends (Quakers), Salvation Army, Brethren, Mormon, Unitarian and Jehovah's Witnesses)
- other (includes Jewish, Muslim and Sikh)

Only a very small number of same-sex couples marry in religious ceremonies; the number of religious ceremonies is published, however, information on the type of ceremony is not published because of the small number. Same-sex couples cannot marry in the Church of England or the Church in Wales.

Rates

Marriage rates have been calculated using the most up-to-date estimates of the population. Tables that include rates provide information on the specific denominators used to calculate each rate.

Cohort analysis – method to produce cohort analyses

Method to produce Tables 14a and 14b: Proportions of men and women who had ever married by certain ages

Tables 14a and 14b are available as part of [our Marriages in England and Wales dataset](#).

Using males as an example to illustrate how this table was created, the numbers of men of each age first marrying each year are combined with population estimates of never married or civil partnered by age, to estimate the proportion of men born in each year who have ever had a first marriage by each birthday. A standard life table methodology is used to calculate probabilities of first marriage that are then applied to a hypothetical stationary population. This method enables the proportion ever married by each exact age to be estimated. Data are presented either in exact years or in completed years. When ages are presented in “exact years”, the figures should be interpreted as proportions of people married up to that actual birthday. So “exact age 30” represents marriages through to the last day a person is 29 (the day before their 30th birthday). When ages are presented in “completed years”, the figures should be interpreted as the proportion of people married at the age they reached on their last birthday. So proportions of people married at completed age 30 represent marriages up to the day before a person's 31st birthday.

By taking into account the latest population estimates of who never married or civil partnered rather than simply the number of men born in a particular year, it also takes into account changes in the sizes of cohorts since birth because of death and migration and excludes men who have been previously married or in a civil partnership. The long time series of marriage statistics enables cohorts of people born as long ago as the first part of the 20th century to be analysed.

For 2014 marriages data onwards, first marriages include people entering into a marriage with either an opposite-sex or a same-sex partner. For these cohort analyses, same-sex couples converting their civil partnership into a marriage will be included with people forming their first marriage because previous marital status is unknown; therefore, within this table we are assuming a previous partnership status of never married or in a civil partnership.

Method to produce Tables 15a and 15b: Proportions of men and women who had ever remarried by certain ages

Tables 15a and 15b are available as part of [our Marriages in England and Wales dataset](#).

The method to produce this table is similar to that used to produce Tables 14a and 14b, with two differences:

- the total male or female population, rather than the single male or female population, is used
- this is combined with the number of males or females remarrying, (including people who have previously been in a civil partnership), rather than marrying for the first time, each year; for 2014 marriages data onwards, remarriages include people entering into a marriage with either an opposite-sex or a same-sex partner.

Assumptions in the cohort analyses

The proportions in these tables assume that couples living in England or Wales marry in England or Wales. So, it does not take into account couples who marry elsewhere, or couples who live elsewhere who marry in England or Wales. Both of these factors will affect the true proportions. Previous research in the [Population Trends report: marriages abroad, 2002 to 2007 \(PDF, 1,815 KB\)](#) has shown that the former category is likely to be larger than the latter, which means that the proportions of men and women married by certain ages shown here could be an underestimation of the true proportions.

If previous marital status information is not available on any marriage records, a previous marital status of never married or civil partnered is assumed for these tables only.

7 . Other useful links and marriage related articles

Further statistics on [marriages](#), [civil partnership formations and dissolutions](#), and [families and households](#) are available. [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#) provide the estimated population by age group, sex and legal partnership status for England and Wales. Ministry of Justice statistics on [divorce](#) are also available.

Other related articles include:

[Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s](#)

Archived release | September 2011

Population trends 145, Beaujouan E, Ní Bhrolcháin M.

[Changes in the distribution of marital age differences in England and Wales, 1963 to 1998](#)

Archived release | December 2003

Population trends 114, Hancock R, Stuchbury R, Tomassini C.

[Living arrangements in contemporary Britain: having a partner who usually lives elsewhere and living apart together \(LAT\)](#)

Archived release | January 2006

Population trends 122, Haskey J.

[The age difference at marriage in England and Wales: a century of patterns and trends](#)

Archived release | June 2005

Population trends 120, Ní Bhrolcháin M.

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

Article | February 2023

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

[Local marriage markets in Great Britain: how diverse?](#)

Archived release | September 2002

Population trends 109, Ní Bhrolcháin M, Wilson T, Sigle-Rushton W.

[Marriage and divorce on the rise at 65 and over](#)

Article | July 2017

[What percentage of marriages end in divorce?](#)

Archived content | February 2013

[What's the best time for a wedding?](#)

Article | August 2016

[Marriages abroad 2002 to 2007](#)

Archived content | September 2008

Population trends 133.

[Estimating the cohabiting population](#)

Archived content | June 2009

Population trends 136, Wilson B.

[Age differences at marriage and divorce](#)

Archived content | July 2008

Population trends 132, Wilson B, Smallwood S.

[The proportion of marriages ending in divorce](#)

Archived content | March 2008

Population trends 131, Wilson B, Smallwood S,

[Understanding recent trends in marriage](#)

Archived content | June 2007

Population trends 128, Wilson B, Smallwood S.

[Do partnerships last? Comparing marriage and cohabitation using the ONS Longitudinal Study](#)

Archived content | March 2010

Population trends 139, Wilson B, Stuchbury R.

8 . Further information

Special extracts and tabulations of marriage data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) charging policy](#), where appropriate).

Enquiries should be made to Demography via email to pop.info@ons.gov.uk or by telephone on +44 1329 44466144. [User requested data on marriages](#) will also be published.

We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback to the email address in the previous paragraph.

9 . Glossary

Approved premises

Under the [Marriage Act 1994](#), civil marriages can take place in approved premises (other than register offices). The [Marriages and Civil Partnerships \(Approved Premises\) Regulations 2005](#) allow for premises to be approved by a local authority for marriages and civil partnership formations to take place. These include hotels, stately homes and historic buildings.

Authorised person

An authorised person is appointed by the Registrar General to register marriages that take place in a named registered building in a duplicate register.

Banns

A marriage in the Church of England or Church in Wales requires the publication of banns of marriage on three Sundays preceding it. Banns ask for public confirmation that the parties involved are legally eligible for marriage.

Civil marriage

Civil marriages are those that are carried out at either a register office or approved premises by, or in the presence of, a registrar, and do not include any religious content. The couple must personally give a formal notice of their intention to marry to the superintendent registrar of the district(s) where they have resided for the previous seven days.

General Register Office (GRO)

The GRO (part of the Identity and Passport Service since 1 April 2008 and renamed HM Passport Office on 13 May 2013) is responsible for ensuring the registration of all births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships that have occurred in England and Wales and for maintaining a central archive.

Registrar

Local authority employee responsible for the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.

Registrar General

Statutory appointment with responsibility for the administration of the Registration Acts in England and Wales and other related functions as specified by the relevant legislation.

Registration officer

Generic term for registrar, superintendent registrar and additional registrars.

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 take place according to the rites of the Society of Friends and those professing the Jewish religion.

RON

Registration Online. A web-based system which enables registrars to record births, stillbirths, deaths, civil partnerships and marriages online. Marriages have been recorded on RON since January 2011.

Superintendent registrar

Local authority employee with responsibilities relating to marriage and other registration functions, as specified in the relevant legislation.

UK Code of Practice for Statistics

The principles and practices to be followed and upheld by those involved in producing official statistics.

10 . Cite this methodology

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 27 August 2024, ONS website, methodology, [User guide to marriage statistics](#)