

Statistical bulletin

# Civil partnerships in England and Wales: 2017

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



Contact:  
Nicola Haines  
vsob@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)1329 444110

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# 1 . Main points

- There were 908 civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2017, an increase of 2.0% compared with 2016; this is the second annual increase since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples was announced in 2013.
- Almost two-thirds (66%) of all civil partnerships formed in 2017 were between men.
- The increase in the number of civil partnership formations between 2016 and 2017 resulted solely from an 8.0% rise (23 civil partnerships) in civil partnerships between women, civil partnership formation among men decreased by 0.8% (five civil partnerships).
- More than half (51%) of those entering a civil partnership in 2017 were aged 50 years and over; this compares with 19% in 2013, prior to the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples.
- In 2017, the average age of men forming a civil partnership (50.3 years) was higher than for women (49.5 years).
- London continued to be the most popular region for the formation of civil partnerships; 37% of all formations in England and Wales in 2017 took place in London.
- There were 1,217 civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2017, of these 57% were to female couples.

## 2 . Statistician's comment

"Despite the introduction of marriages for same-sex couples in March 2014, the number of same-sex couples choosing to form civil partnerships has increased slightly for the second consecutive year. Almost two-thirds of couples entering into a civil partnership in 2017 were male and more than half of all civil partners were aged 50 years or above. However, our latest data on marriages from 2015 shows that male couples accounted for less than half of all marriages between same-sex couples while only 16% of those marrying a partner of the same-sex were aged 50 and over."

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

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## 3 . Things you need to know about this release

Important information for interpreting these statistics on civil partnership formations and dissolutions:

- civil partnership formation statistics are derived from information recorded by the General Register Office (GRO) when civil partnerships are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement
- figures represent civil partnerships that are formed in England and Wales only; civil partnership formations to residents of England and Wales that take place abroad are not included
- civil partnership dissolution statistics are derived from information recorded by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) during the dissolution process, figures include annulments
- our dissolution statistics do not include couples who separate, but do not dissolve their civil partnership
- 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 has a permanent home in England and Wales
- statistics on marriages and divorces of same-sex couples are published in [Marriages in England and Wales](#) from the 2014 data year onwards and [Divorces in England and Wales](#) from the 2015 data year onwards

## **4 . The number of civil partnerships formed increased in 2017**

This is the second year that civil partnership formations have increased since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples was announced in December 2013. There were 908 civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2017, a rise of 2.0% compared with 890 in 2016 (Figure 1). However, civil partnership formation numbers in 2017 were around one-sixth of what they were in 2013 before the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in March 2014.

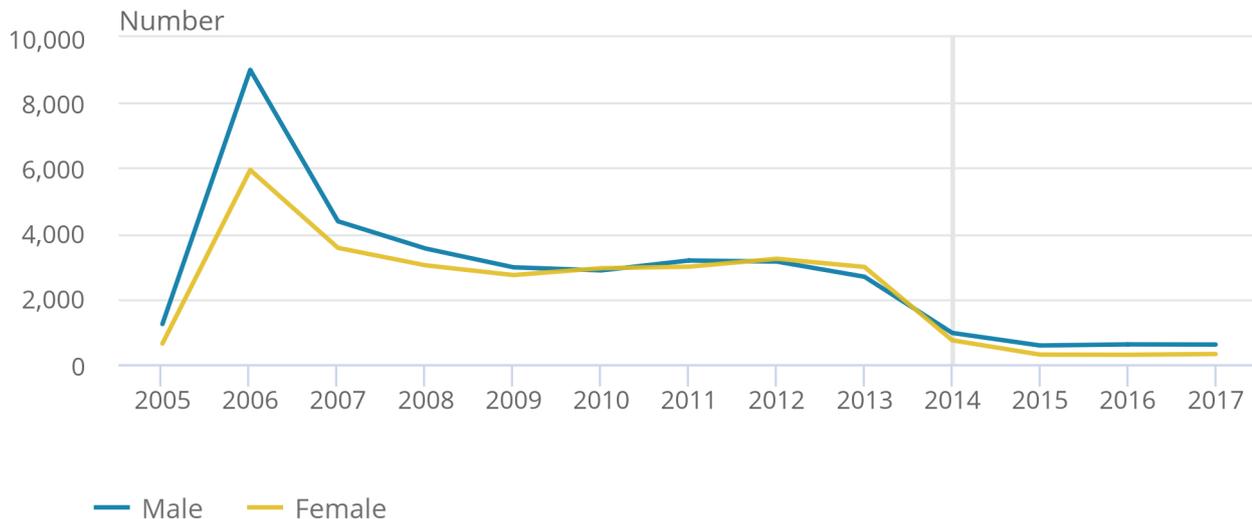
**Figure 1: Civil partnership formations by sex, 2005 to 2017**

England and Wales

Figure 1: Civil partnership formations by sex, 2005 to 2017

Introduction of same-sex coupl

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Following the introduction of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), the first day that couples could normally form a partnership was 21 December 2005 in England and Wales.
2. An announcement was made in December 2013 that marriages of same-sex couples could take place in England and Wales from 29 March 2014.

The increase in the number of civil partnership formations between 2016 and 2017 resulted solely from an 8.0% rise in civil partnerships between women; an increase of 23 civil partnerships. The number of men forming civil partnerships decreased by 0.8%; a decrease of five civil partnerships.

Almost two-thirds (66%) of all civil partnerships formed in 2017 were between men, a similar proportion to those seen since 2015 (Figure 2). In contrast, our latest [statistics on marriages](#) show that in 2015, only 44% of same-sex couples marrying were male.

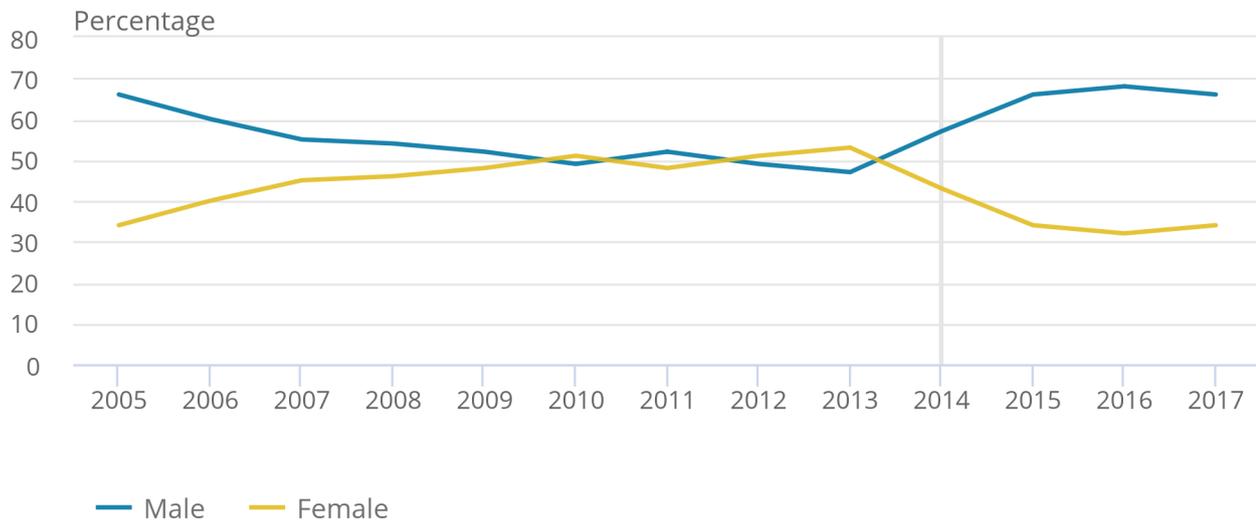
**Figure 2: Civil partnership formations by sex (percentage), 2005 to 2017**

England and Wales

Figure 2: Civil partnership formations by sex (percentage), 2005 to 2017

Introduction of marriage for same-sex couples

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Following the introduction of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), the first day that couples could normally form a partnership was 21 December 2005 in England and Wales.
2. An announcement was made in December 2013 that marriages of same-sex couples could take place in England and Wales from 29 March 2014.

In 2006, the first full year in which civil partnerships could be formed, male couples accounted for 60% of all civil partnerships. During the years 2009 to 2013, the number of civil partnerships formed by male and female couples was roughly equal. Since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in 2014, the percentage of civil partnerships formed between men has remained higher than for women.

## 5. More than half of those entering a civil partnership in 2017 were aged 50 years and over

Similar to December 2005, when civil partnerships were first introduced, more than half (51%) of people entering a civil partnership in 2017 were aged 50 years and over. This fell to a low of 17% between 2010 and 2012. Since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in 2014, older people have once again made up a far greater proportion of civil partnerships (Figure 3).

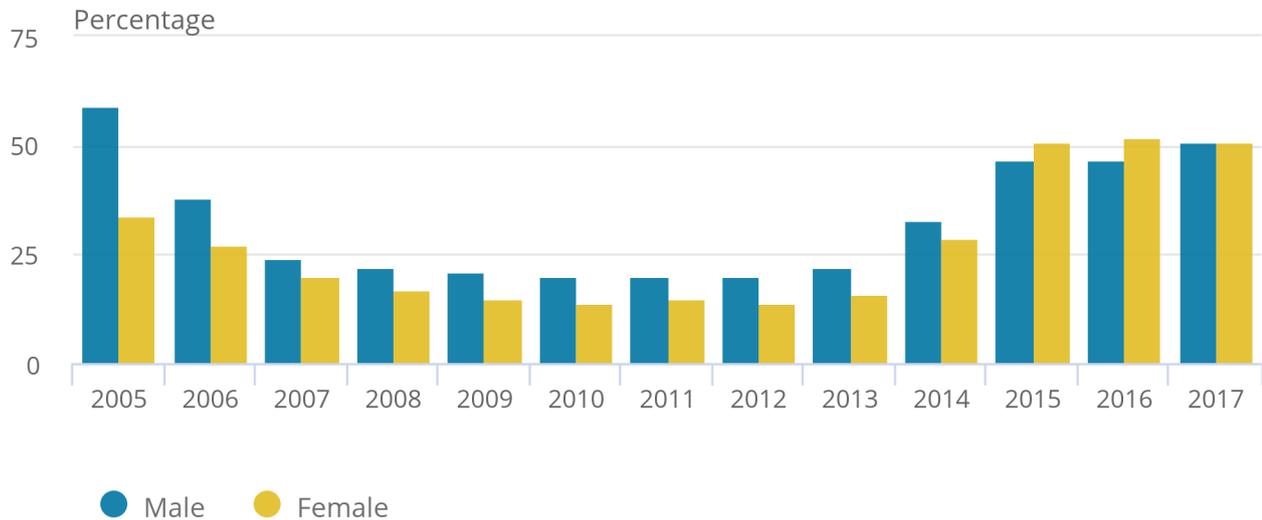
**Figure 3: Percentage of people forming civil partnerships who were aged 50 years and over, by sex, 2005 to 2017**

England and Wales

Figure 3: Percentage of people forming civil partnerships who were aged 50 years and over, by sex, 2005 to 2017

Introduction of n same-sex couple

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
2. Following the introduction of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), the first day that couples could normally form a partnership was 21 December 2005 in England and Wales.
3. An announcement was made in December 2013 that marriages of same-sex couples could take place in England and Wales from 29 March 2014.

The increased percentage of civil partnerships formed by those aged 50 years and over has resulted in a rise in the average (mean) age at civil partnership formation.

In 2017, the average age of men forming a civil partnership (50.3 years) was higher than women (49.5 years). This has reversed the pattern of women on average forming civil partnerships at later ages than men which was seen in 2015 and 2016.

## 6 . The majority of people forming a civil partnership had never previously married or formed a civil partnership

Figure 4 shows the age distribution of civil partners broken down by previous marital status. The majority of people forming a civil partnership in 2017 were previously single (85%); single refers to people who have never married or formed a civil partnership.

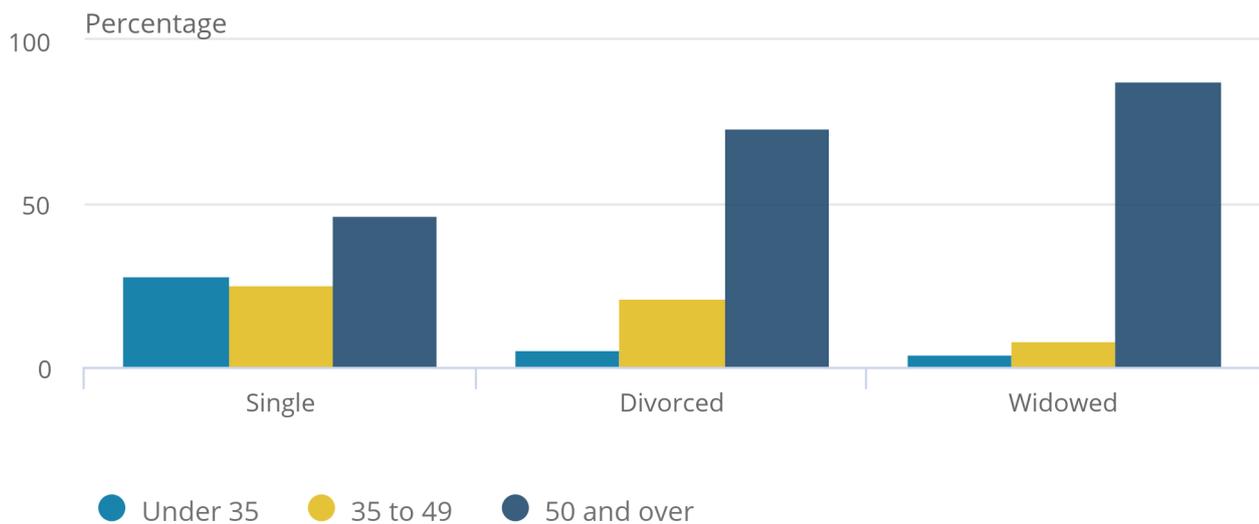
Of all previously single persons forming a civil partnership in 2017, nearly half (47%) were aged 50 years and over, while 28% were aged under 35 years and 25% were aged 35 to 49 years. In contrast, those who were either previously divorced or widowed were generally aged 50 and over (73% and 88% respectively).

**Figure 4: Age distribution of civil partners by previous marital status, 2017**

England and Wales

Figure 4: Age distribution of civil partners by previous marital status, 2017

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Single refers to people who have never married or formed a civil partnership.
2. Divorced refers to people whose marriage or civil partnership has been terminated by dissolution or annulment.
3. Widowed refers to people whose former marriage or civil partnership has been terminated by the death of the spouse or civil partner.

## 7 . London continued to be the most popular region to form a civil partnership

Of all formations in England and Wales, 37% took place in London. This compares with 38% in 2016 and 34% in 2015.

More men than women formed civil partnerships in most regions of England in 2017. The exceptions were Yorkshire and The Humber and the North East, where a higher number of women than men formed civil partnerships. In Wales, more women than men formed a civil partnership in 2017. However, the relatively small number of formations in these areas should be taken into account when making comparisons.

**Table 1: Number of civil partnership formations by sex and area of occurrence, 2017**

England, Wales and regions within England

<b>Area of formation</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
England	908	599	309
North East	11	5	6
North West	63	36	27
Yorkshire and The Humber	44	21	23
East Midlands	42	26	16
West Midlands	51	32	19
East	68	48	20
London	334	264	70
South East	166	98	68
South West	97	54	43
Wales	32	15	17

Source: Office for National Statistics

The London Borough of Islington had the highest number of civil partnership formations for a local authority in England, with 45 in 2017 (36 male and 9 female). Brighton and Hove (22 male and 11 female) and Southwark (22 male and 9 female) were second and third respectively. The unitary authority in Wales with the highest number of civil partnership formations was Cardiff, with 10 in 2017 (5 male and 5 female).

See Table 3 in [Civil Partnership Formations in England and Wales](#) for more figures by area of occurrence.

## 8 . Civil partnership dissolutions fell for the first time

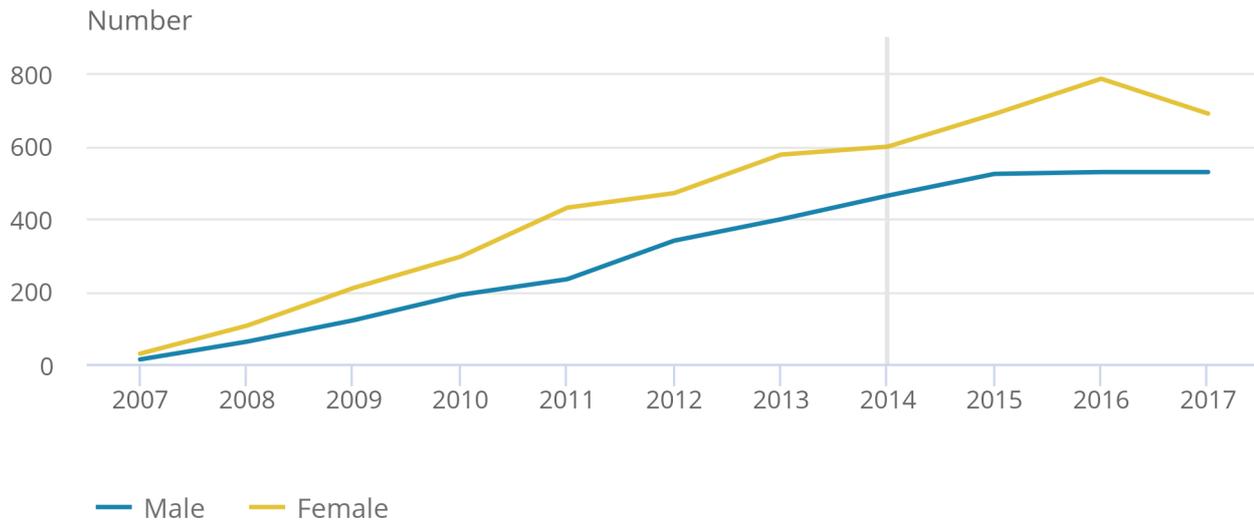
There were 1,217 civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2017, compared with 1,313 in 2016; a decrease of 7.3%. This is the first year that the number of dissolutions has fallen since dissolutions were first recorded in 2007. Female couples accounted for 57% of all dissolutions in 2017. The decrease in civil partnership dissolutions has been driven by female couples. There was a 12% decline in the number of female civil partnership dissolutions in 2017 compared with 2016; the number of male couples dissolving a civil partnership remained the same.

Every year, more civil partnership dissolutions have occurred between female than male couples (Figure 5). This is despite the fact that historically a greater number of men have formed civil partnerships (Figure 2).

**Figure 5: Civil partnership dissolutions by sex, 2007 to 2017**

England and Wales

Figure 5: Civil partnership dissolutions by sex, 2007 to 2017  
Introduction of marriage for same-sex couples (2014)  
England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

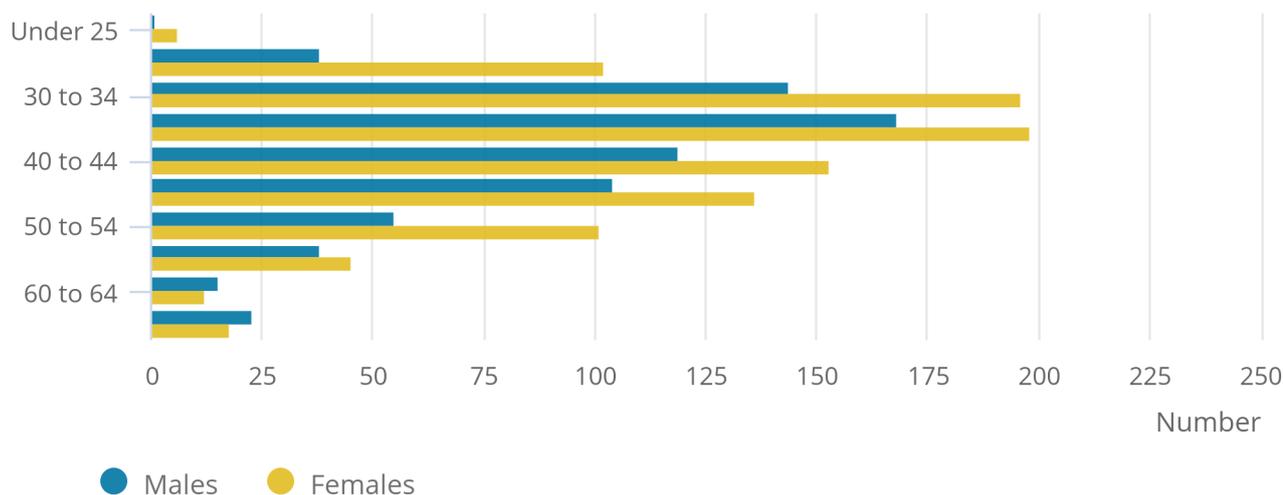
The rising number of dissolutions between 2007 and 2016 was partly a consequence of the increase in the number of civil partners living in England and Wales following the introduction of civil partnerships in 2005. Since 2014, and the introduction of marriages for same-sex couples, the number of civil partnership formations has fallen considerably.

**Figure 6: Civil partnership dissolutions by age and sex, 2017**

England and Wales

Figure 6: Civil partnership dissolutions by age and sex, 2017

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures by age will not sum to the total number of civil partnerships. In 2017, 31% of individuals had no age recorded on the civil partnership dissolution record; this has increased notably from 11% in 2013. We are working with the courts to improve this.

At younger ages, more women than men dissolved their civil partnership in 2017 (Figure 6); however this was reversed among those aged 60 years and over.

The average (mean) age at which civil partnerships are dissolved has increased gradually since 2010 when it was 38.3 years, reaching 41.4 years in 2017. The average age of men and women dissolving a civil partnership in 2017 was older for men (42.2 years) compared to women (40.8 years).

## 9 . What is the future of civil partnerships?

The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) enabled same-sex couples in England and Wales to obtain legal recognition of their relationship by registering as civil partners. The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) enabled same-sex couples in England and Wales to marry from 29 March 2014. It also has a number of related provisions, including the opportunity for those in a civil partnership to convert that relationship to a marriage if they choose to do so and provisions that enable a person to change their legal gender without ending their existing marriage. These other provisions came into force on 10 December 2014. The act does not remove the availability of civil partnerships for same-sex couples.

The government has committed to undertake further work to inform a decision on the future of civil partnerships and set out its plans in [The Future Operation of Civil Partnership: Gathering Further Information](#) command paper that was published on 10 May 2018. It has been looking at the available data on the take-up of civil partnerships and marriage amongst same-sex couples and intends to address the difference in treatment of same and opposite-sex couples as soon as possible.

## 10 . Links to related statistics

Further statistics on civil partnership [formations](#) and [dissolutions](#), [marriages](#), [families and households](#), and [population estimates by marital status](#) are available.

The number of civil partnership formations and dissolutions for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#). The tables also provide civil partnership formation and dissolution rates for England and Wales as a whole.

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 Vital Statistics Outputs Branch via email to [vsob@ons.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gov.uk) or telephone: +44 (0)1329 444110. We also publish [user requested data](#).

## 11 . Quality and methodology

This is the first time that 2017 civil partnership statistics for England and Wales have been published. Civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2017 but received by us after 25 April 2018 are not included in this bulletin.

Civil partnership statistics are compiled to enable the analysis of social and demographic trends. They are also used for considering and monitoring policy changes.

The [Civil Partnerships Quality and Methodology Information](#) contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares 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

Civil partnership statistics are comparable between countries within the UK; more information on comparability is available in our [Civil Partnerships Quality and Methodology Information](#).

[Revisions policies for population statistics \(including civil partnership statistics\)](#) are available.

The average (mean) age at civil partnership formation and dissolution is the sum of all age values divided by the total number of values. The average age is based on the whole age of the individual; the age last birthday. This calculation assumes that the ages are evenly spread between successive single years of age.