

Statistical bulletin

# Civil partnerships in England and Wales: 2019

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.



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# 1 . Main points

- There were 167 opposite-sex civil partnerships formed in England and Wales on 31 December 2019; this was the first day it was possible to do so following the change in legislation to extend civil partnerships rights to opposite-sex couples.
- There were 994 same-sex civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2019; this was an increase of 4.0% from 956 in 2018 and an increase of 9.5% from 908 in 2017.
- The majority (61%) of same-sex civil partnerships in England and Wales in 2019 were between men, a lower proportion compared with the previous year (65%).
- Nearly in one in five (19%) of those entering a same-sex civil partnership in 2019 were aged 65 years and over; this compares with just 4.0% in 2013, prior to the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples.
- About three-quarters (72%) of same-sex civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2019 were to couples where both partners were single (that is, never previously entered into a marriage or civil partnership); this percentage has remained broadly consistent since the introduction of same-sex civil partnerships in 2005.
- There were 916 same-sex civil partnerships dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2019, a small decrease of 1.2% from 927 in 2018; of these, 54% were to female couples.

## Statistician's comment

“On 31st December 2019, civil partnerships were extended to opposite-sex couples after having historically been only for same-sex couples. On this day, 167 opposite-sex couples took the opportunity to register their partnerships. Meanwhile, just under 1,000 same-sex couples also chose to form a civil partnership during 2019, a small increase from the previous year. Around 1 in 5 of those forming same-sex partnerships in 2019 were over the age of 65, a noticeable increase since 2013 where it was only 1 in 25.

“Next year, we expect to see further increases to the overall number of civil partnerships in England and Wales as more opposite-sex couples choose to become civil partners.”

Kanak Ghosh, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

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# 2 . Civil partnership formations

## Number of civil partnerships

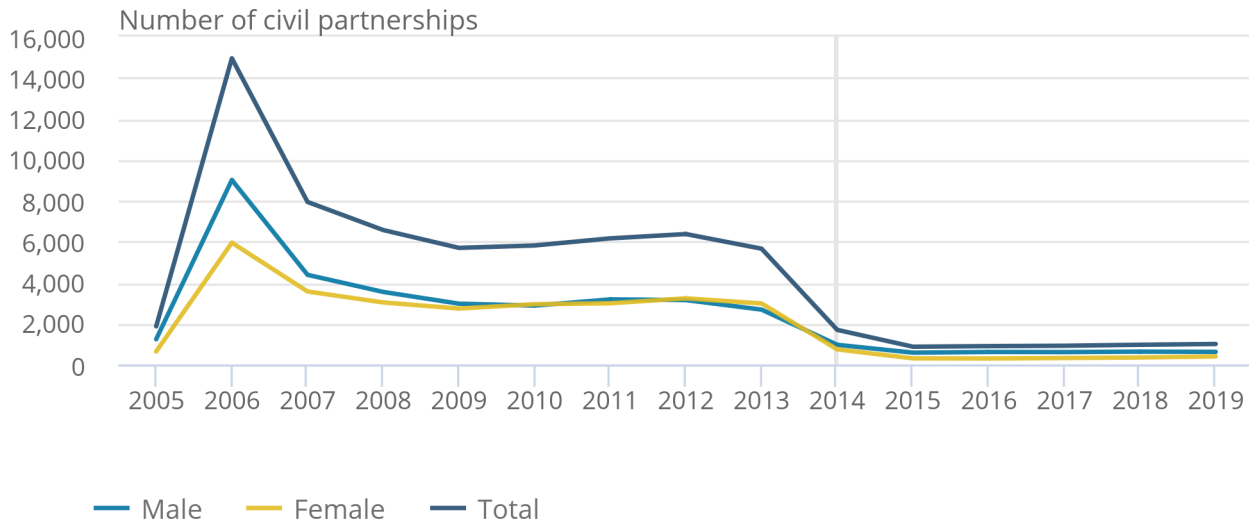
There were 994 same-sex civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2019, a small increase of 4.0% from 956 in 2018 and an increase of 9.5% from 908 in 2017. However, civil partnerships formations in 2019 remained 82% lower than in 2013, a consequence of the introduction of same-sex marriages in March 2014, which has led to more couples choosing to marry than form a civil partnership.

**Figure 1: The number of same-sex civil partnerships fell in 2014 and 2015 following the introduction of same-sex marriages and has remained stable since then**

Number of same-sex civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2019

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Number of same-sex civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Civil partnerships in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Following the introduction of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), the first day that couples could normally form a same-sex 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 same-sex civil partnership formations in 2019 was driven by a 15% increase in the number of female partnerships; the number of partnerships between men fell slightly by 1.8%.

Following the change in legislation allowing opposite-sex couples to enter into a civil partnership, there were 167 partnerships registered by opposite-sex couples on 31 December 2019. This was the first day that opposite-sex couples could legally enter a civil partnership in England and Wales.

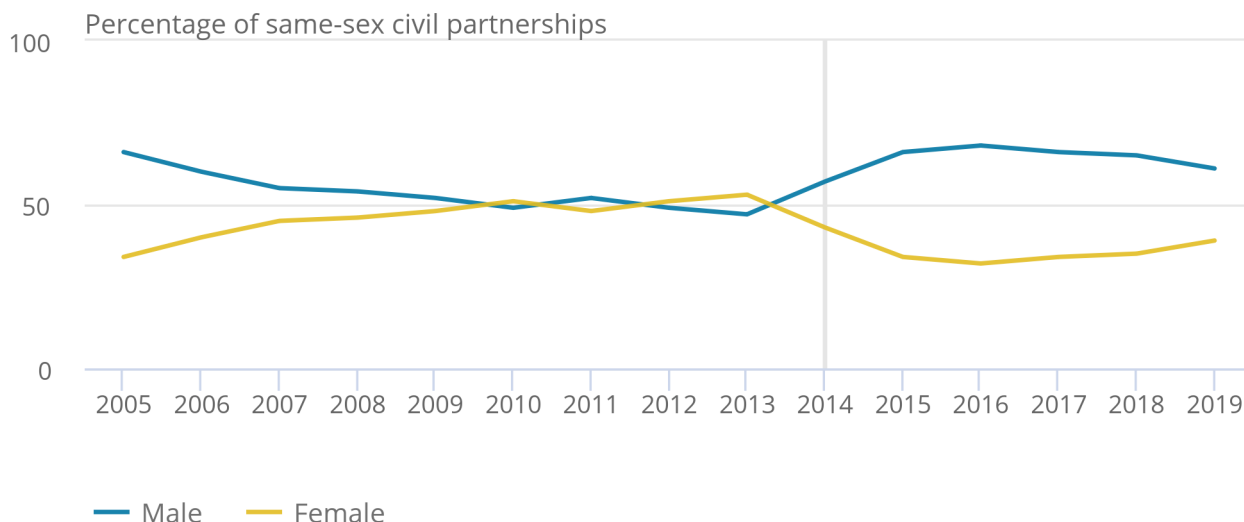
**Figure 2: The majority of same-sex civil partnerships in 2019 were between male couples**

Percentage of same-sex civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2019

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Same-sex marriages were introduced in March 2014

Percentage of same-sex civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Civil partnerships in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Following the introduction of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), the first day that couples could normally form a same-sex 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 2019, more than half (61%) of all same-sex civil partnerships were between men, a slightly lower proportion compared with the previous year when nearly two-thirds (65%) of partnerships were between men (Figure 2). The percentage of civil partnerships formed between male couples was highest in 2016 (68%) and has decreased each year since then.

Since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in 2014, more men have formed civil partnerships each year than women, likely a consequence of more female couples choosing to marry than male couples. This is supported by our latest [marriage statistics](#) for 2017, which show that 56% of same-sex marriages were between female couples.

## Age of civil partners

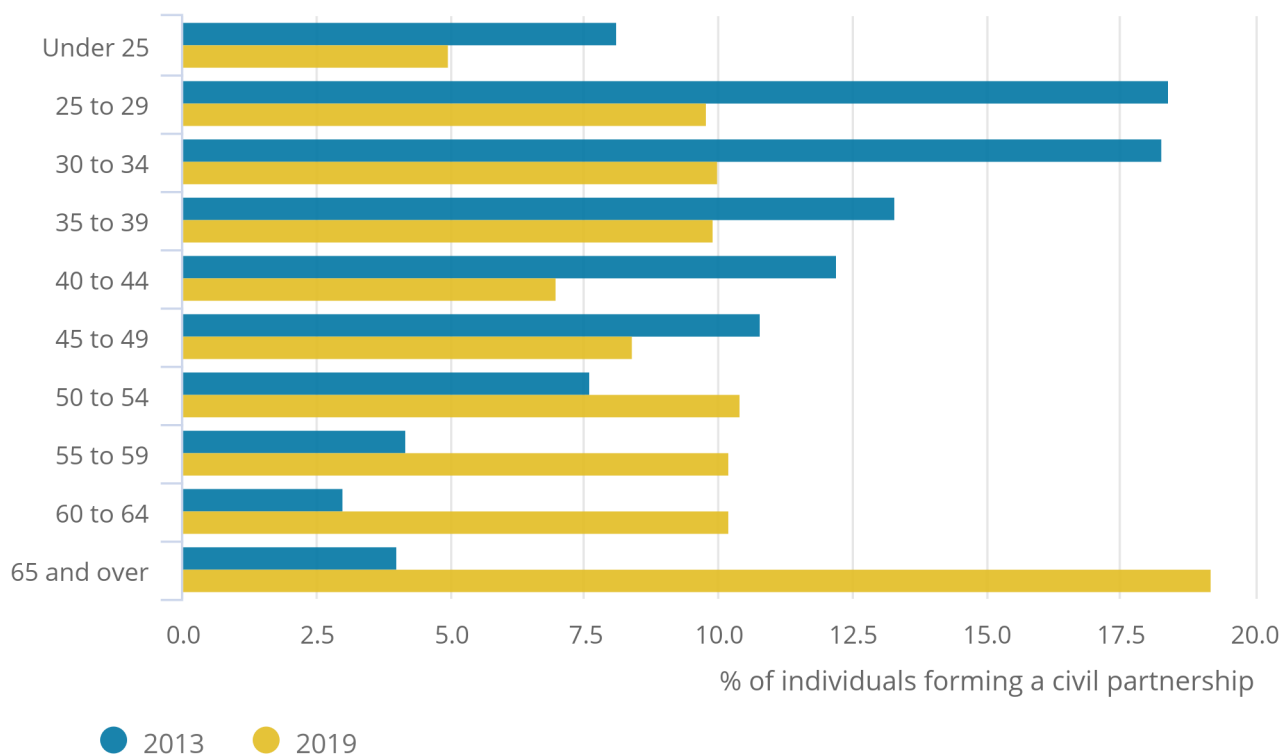
The age distribution of those entering same-sex civil partnerships has changed noticeably since the introduction of same-sex marriages in 2014, and individuals entering same-sex civil partnerships are more likely to be older now (Figure 3).

### Figure 3: Half of all individuals who entered a same-sex civil partnership in 2019 were aged 50 years and over

Percentage of individuals forming a same-sex civil partnership by age, England and Wales, 2013 and 2019

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Percentage of individuals forming a same-sex civil partnership by age, England and Wales, 2013 and 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Civil partnerships in England and Wales

#### Notes:

1. Following the introduction of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), the first day that couples could normally form a same-sex 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.
3. Percentages may not sum exactly because of rounding.

In 2019, half (50%) of all individuals forming a civil partnership were aged 50 years and over, a decrease from 55% in 2018. Prior to the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in 2014, this figure was only 19% (in 2013). There has also been a noticeable increase in the percentage of individuals forming a same-sex civil partnership at ages 65 years and over (19% in 2019 compared with 4.0% in 2013).

The increased percentage of same-sex civil partnerships formed at older ages in recent years has also resulted in a rise in the average (mean) age at partnership formation. In 2019, the mean ages of men and women were similar at 49.4 years and 49.3 years respectively. Since the introduction of same-sex marriages, the mean age at formation for women has increased by more than 11 years from 37.9 years in 2013, while for men it has increased by nearly 9 years from 40.8 years.

The [accompanying dataset](#) for this release provide further breakdowns of same-sex civil partnership formations by country, month of formation, area of formation, age group and previous partnership status.

### **3 . Civil partnership dissolutions**

To obtain a civil partnership dissolution in England and Wales, a couple must have either been in a registered civil partnership for at least 12 months.

There were 916 same-sex civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2019, a small decrease of 1.2% from 927 dissolutions in 2018. Female couples accounted for more than half (54%) of all dissolutions in 2019. The number of dissolutions in 2019 fell by 30% from 1,313 dissolutions in 2016, when it was the highest on record.

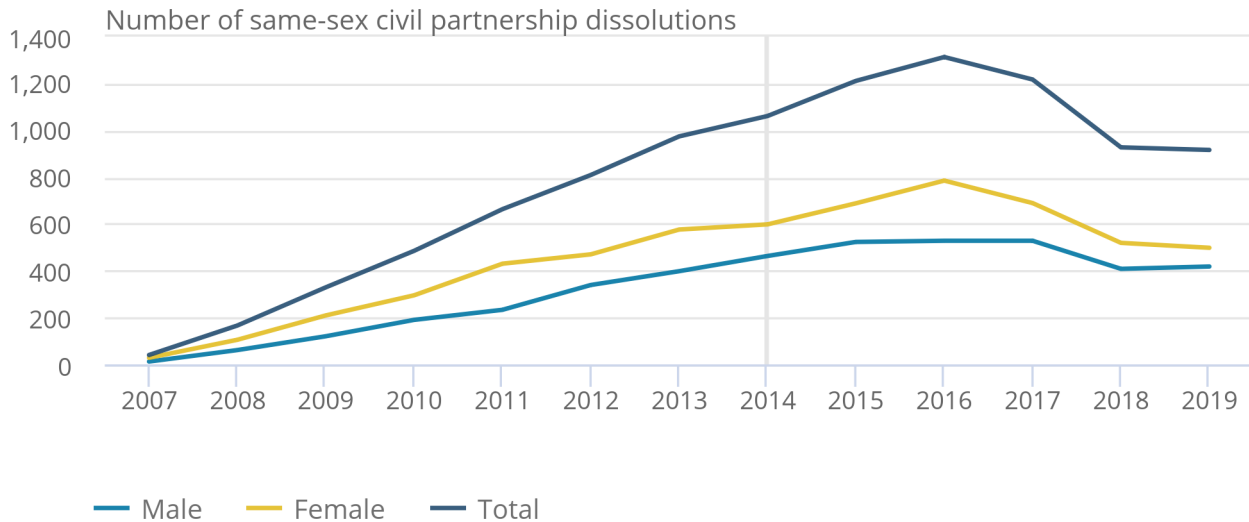
Since civil partnership dissolutions were first recorded in 2007, more dissolutions have occurred between female couples than male couples (Figure 4). This is despite the fact that historically, a greater number of men have formed civil partnerships (Figure 2).

**Figure 4: The number of same-sex civil partnership dissolutions in 2019 increased slightly for male couples but decreased slightly for female couples**

Number of same-sex civil partnership dissolutions by sex, England and Wales, 2007 to 2019

Figure 4: The number of same-sex civil partnership dissolutions in 2019 increased slightly for male couples but decreased slightly for female couples

Number of same-sex civil partnership dissolutions by sex, England and Wales, 2007 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Civil partnerships in England and Wales

Notes:

1. 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 falling number of dissolutions since 2016 is likely to be a consequence of many same-sex couples choosing to marry or to convert their existing partnership into a marriage, leading to a decrease in the size of the civil-partnered population in England and Wales. This is supported by our latest [population estimates by marital status](#), which show that the number of civil partners in England and Wales fell by nearly a quarter (23%) between 2014 and 2019.

The [accompanying dataset](#) for this release provide further breakdowns of same-sex civil partnership dissolutions by country, quarter of dissolution, age group and previous partnership status.

## 4 . Civil partnerships in England and Wales data

### [Civil partnership formations](#)

Dataset | Released 22 September 2020

Annual statistics on the number of civil partnership formations that took place in England and Wales analysed by sex, age, previous marital status and area of occurrence.

### [Civil partnership dissolutions](#)

Dataset | Released 22 September 2020

Annual statistics on the number of civil partnership dissolutions that took place in England and Wales analysed by sex, age, previous marital status and area of occurrence.

## 5 . Glossary

### **Civil partnership**

A civil partnership is a legal relationship between two people of the same or opposite sex.

### **Civil partnership formation**

A civil partnership is formed when the parties involved register as civil partners in the presence of a registration officer and two witnesses.

### **Civil partnership dissolution**

A civil partnership dissolution is the termination of a civil partnership and is a procedure similar to divorce. The grounds for ending a civil partnership are similar to those available to married couples, with the exception of adultery.

### **General Register Office**

The [General Register Office \(GRO\)](#) (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.

### **HM Courts and Tribunals Service**

[HM Courts and Tribunals Service \(HMCTS\)](#) is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for the administration of criminal, civil and family courts and tribunals in England and Wales. This includes the administration of the divorce and civil partnership dissolution processes.



## Government Equalities Office

The [Government Equalities Office \(GEO\)](#) is the government department responsible for a range of equalities policy and legislation and is the lead department on gender and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in government including the [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) and [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#).

### Single men or women

Single men or women are persons who have never previously been married or formed a civil partnership.

## 6 . Measuring the data

This is the first time that civil partnership statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2019. The release provides final annual data.

Civil partnership formation statistics are derived from information recorded 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.

The first civil partnership formations between couples of the opposite sex took place on 31 December 2019; these are not included in the [accompanying dataset](#) for this release.

Civil partnership dissolution statistics are derived from information recorded by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) during the dissolution process; figures include annulments. 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.

Civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2019 but received by us after 12 May 2020 are not included in this bulletin. Similarly, civil partnership dissolutions received after 14 July 2020 are not included.

Civil partnership statistics are compiled to enable the analysis of social and demographic trends. They are also used for developing and monitoring government policy and are used by religious and other belief organisations to monitor trends and plan their services.

### The future of civil partnerships

The [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc.\) Act 2019](#) has enabled eligible opposite-sex couples to form a civil partnership from December 2019, and the first of these took place on 31 December 2019. Same-sex couples may convert their existing civil partnership to a marriage if they wish but, at present, opposite-sex couples do not have this right to convert.

In July 2019, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) published a paper and consultation [Implementing Opposite-Sex Civil Partnerships: Next Steps](#), which sought views on proposals to introduce a new right for opposite-sex couples to convert from a marriage to a civil partnership for a limited period of time. The consultation also sought views on proposals to end this new right as well as the existing right for same-sex couples to convert from a civil partnership to marriage after an agreed period of time.

The GEO will publish a response to this consultation in due course, the outcome of which may impact the civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics we produce in the future.

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

## 7 . Strengths and limitations

### National Statistics status for Civil Partnerships in England and Wales

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

Date of most recent full assessment: [December 2011](#)

Most recent compliance check that confirms National Statistics status: [December 2011](#)

Improvements since last review include more timely publication of final statistics for England and Wales. Coverage of annual civil partnership statistics was altered from UK to England and Wales only from the 2014 data year onwards following a consultation exercise in February 2015. Summary figures for the UK continue to be published in [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#). We also undertook a user [consultation exercise](#) in February 2015 to understand the (then current) user requirement for specific civil partnership formation and dissolution tables and the potential demand for new anonymised datasets.

### Comparability

The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) was introduced for the whole of the UK, making the statistics from the different countries within the UK comparable; more information on comparability across the UK is available in the [Civil partnerships in England and Wales QMI](#).

Civil partnership formation statistics are not directly comparable with survey estimates of the number of civil partners in England and Wales from household surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS), as they are estimates of the number of civil partners rather than the number of civil partnerships that took place during a particular year.

### Accuracy

There are sometimes missing values for variables in the dissolution records, in particular for the age and previous marital status variables. Prior to the 2013 data year, these missing values were imputed. From the 2013 data year onwards, any missing age or previous legal status is shown in published tables as “not stated”.

We have seen an increasing proportion of records in recent years where the age is missing for one or both partners of couples who are dissolving their civil partnership. Consequently, any calculations based on age exclude these records. We are working with the HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) to understand the reasons for this and improve the completeness of this variable.

The average (mean) ages presented in this release have not been standardised for age and therefore do not take account of the changing structure of the population by age, sex and marital status.

## 8 . Related links

### [Civil partnership formation statistics for Scotland](#)

Web page | Released 23 June 2020

Marriage and civil partnership formation statistics for Scotland for 2019 and earlier years.

### [Civil partnership dissolution statistics for Scotland](#)

Publication | Released 7 April 2020

Civil justice statistics in Scotland including main statistics tables, figures and supplementary data tables including civil partnership dissolutions statistics.

### [Civil partnership statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

Web page | Released 14 February 2020

Civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland.

### [Civil Partnerships Five Years On \(PDF, 190KB\)](#)

Article | Released July 2011

Compares estimates of the number of men and women living in a civil partnership derived from registration data, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS) for 2006 to 2010.

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

Publication | Released 22 November 2019

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

### [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 17 July 2020

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