

Statistical bulletin

Marriages in England and Wales: 2019

Number of marriages that took place in England and Wales analysed by age, sex, previous marital status and civil or religious ceremony.



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1 . Main points

- There were 219,850 marriages in total in England and Wales in 2019, a decrease of 6.4% from 2018.
- In 2019, there were 213,122 marriages between opposite-sex couples, a decrease of 6.5% from 2018 and 6,728 marriages between same-sex couples, a decrease of 2.8% from 2018.
- Marriage rates for opposite-sex couples have fallen to their lowest on record since 1862; in 2019, for men, there were 18.6 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men; for women, there were 17.2 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women.
- In 2019, religious ceremonies accounted for less than one in five (18.7%) of opposite-sex marriages, a decrease from 21.1% in 2018 and the lowest percentage on record; for same-sex marriages, 0.7% of marriages were religious ceremonies.
- The average (median) age at marriage for opposite-sex couples in 2019 was 34.3 years for men and 32.3 years for women; for same-sex couples this was higher at 38.1 years for men and 33.8 years for women.
- Among marriages of opposite-sex couples in 2019, more than three-quarters of men and women (76.1% and 77.1%, respectively) married for the first time; among same-sex couples, first marriages were slightly higher with 89.3% of men and 81.8% of women marrying for the first time.

Statistician's comment

"Today's data show a decline in marriage rates for opposite-sex couples while rates for same-sex couples have remained the same.

"The number of opposite-sex marriages has fallen by 50% since 1972. This decline is a likely consequence of increasing numbers of men and women delaying marriage, or couples choosing to live together rather than marry, either as a precursor to marriage or as an alternative. Future analysis will show the impact of the pandemic on marriages rates."

Dr James Tucker, Head of Health and Life Events Analysis, Office for National Statistics

2 . Numbers and rates

Number of marriages

There were 219,850 marriages in England and Wales in 2019, a decrease of 6.4% from 234,795 in 2018. This was the largest annual decrease since 2012 and is the lowest number of marriages since 1893 (218,689).

In 2019, there were 213,122 opposite-sex marriages, a decrease of 6.5% from 2018 (227,870) and there were 6,728 same-sex marriages, a decrease of 2.8% from 2018 (6,925). Of these same-sex marriages, 57.4% were between female couples. Every year since the introduction of same-sex marriages in 2014, there have been more female than male same-sex marriages.

There has been a gradual decline in the number of marriages since the early 1970s (Figure 1); the number of opposite-sex marriages has fallen by 50.0% since 1972.

Marriage rates

Marriage rates take account of changes in the size of the unmarried adult population, as well as the number of marriages and therefore provide a better indication of changing trends.

Marriage rates for opposite-sex couples have fallen to their lowest on record since 1862. In 2019, for men, there were 18.6 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men, a decrease from 20.1 in 2018. For women, there were 17.2 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women, a decrease from 18.6 in 2018.

The long-term decline in marriage rates is a likely consequence of increasing numbers of men and women delaying marriage, or couples choosing to cohabit rather than marry, either as a precursor to marriage or as an alternative. More information about this is available in [our bulletin, Marriages in England and Wales: 2013](#).

Figure 1: Marriage rates have generally fallen since their peak in 1972

Number of opposite-sex marriages and rates, England and Wales, 1929 to 2019

[Download the data](#)

The rates for males and females entering into same-sex marriages remained unchanged in 2019, with 0.5 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and 0.6 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women, respectively.

3 . Age at marriage

In 2019, among opposite-sex couples, more women than men married at ages 30 and under and more men than women married at ages 30 and over. On average, women tend to form marriages with men older than themselves. For same-sex couples, more women than men married at ages under 50 and more men married at ages over 50.

Marriage rates by age

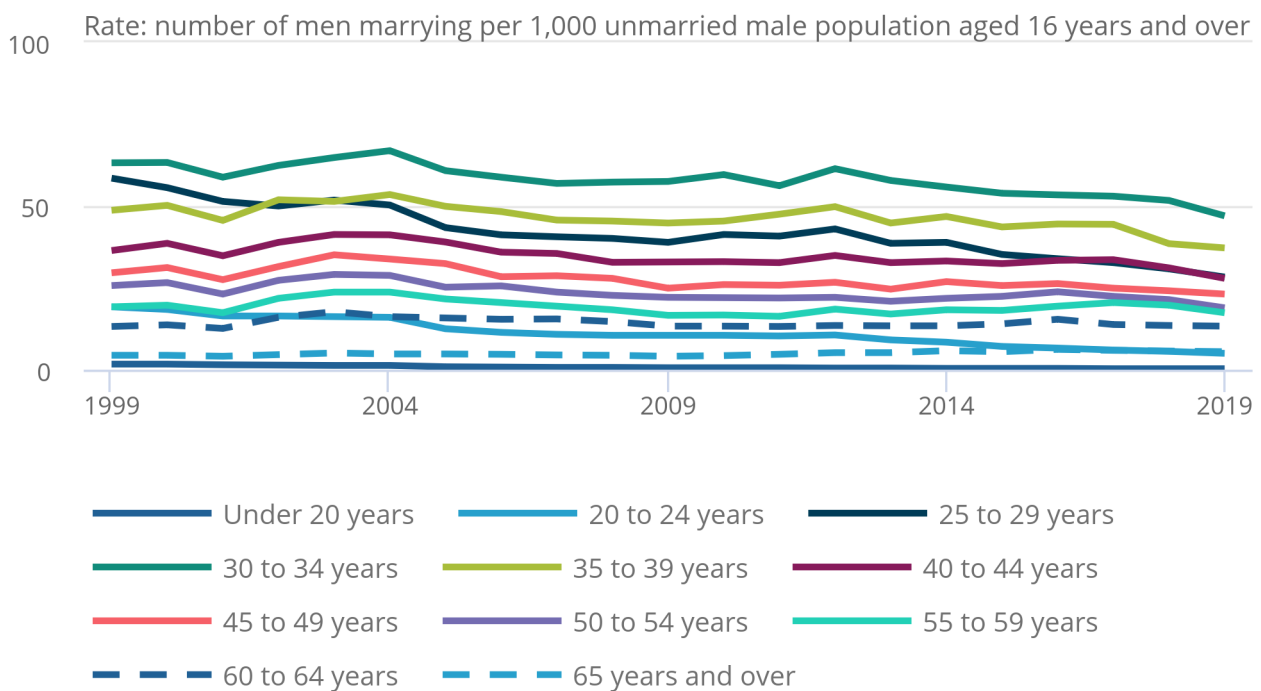
Marriage rates have been declining. Among opposite-sex couples, rates for men and women stayed the same or decreased across all age groups apart from women aged 35 to 39 years and aged 60 to 64 years, which slightly increased from 2018 to 2019. Men aged 30 to 34 years had the biggest numerical decrease, from 51.7 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men in 2018 to 47.0 in 2019 (Figure 2a). For women, the biggest decrease was in the 25 to 29 years age group from 45.8 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women in 2018 to 41.4 in 2019 (Figure 2b).

Figure 2a: Marriage rates across age groups for men have generally decreased

Marriage rates for men in opposite-sex marriages by age group, England and Wales, 1999 to 2019

Figure 2a: Marriage rates across age groups for men have generally decreased

Marriage rates for men in opposite-sex marriages by age group, England and Wales, 1999 to 2019



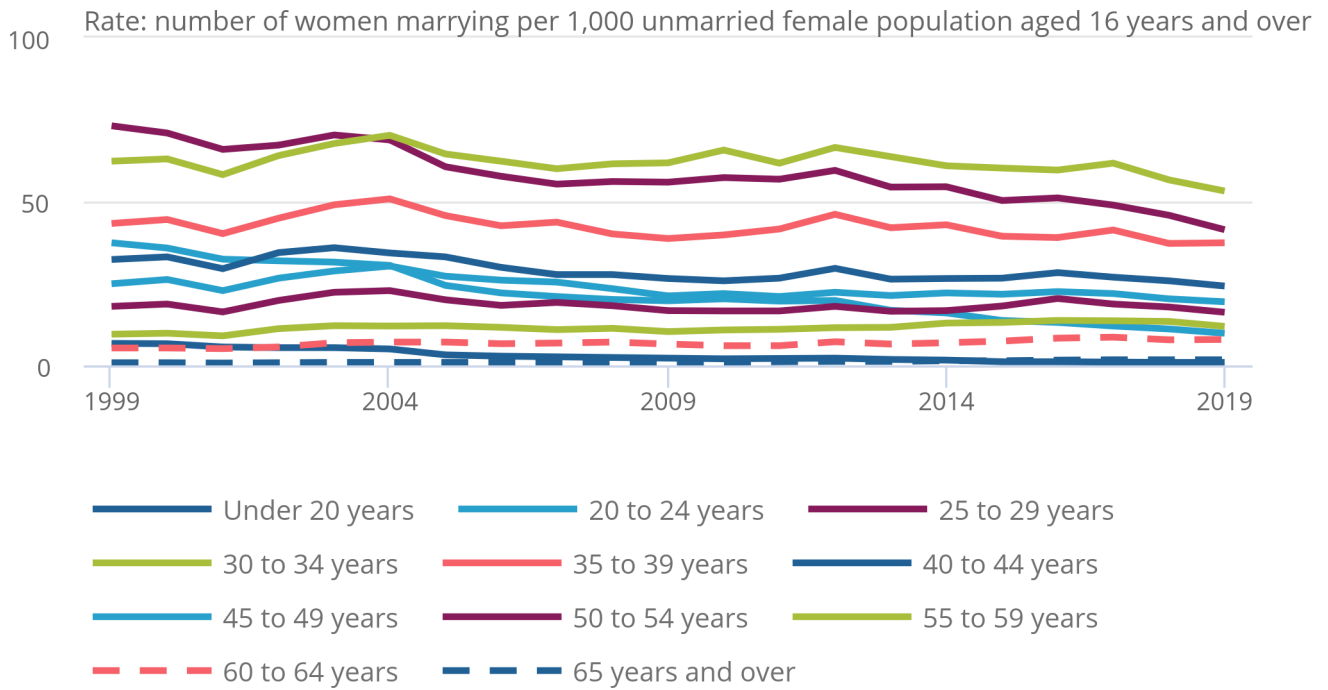
Source: Office for National Statistics – Marriages in England and Wales

Figure 2b: Marriage rates across age groups for women have generally decreased

Marriage rates for women in opposite-sex marriages by age-group, England and Wales, 1999 to 2019

Figure 2b: Marriage rates across age groups for women have generally decreased

Marriage rates for women in opposite-sex marriages by age-group, England and Wales, 1999 to 2019



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

Average age at marriage

The average (median) age at marriage for opposite-sex couples in 2019 was 34.3 years for men and 32.3 years for women. This is a slight increase from 2009 for both men and women and this continues the trend of the overall rise in average age at marriage since the early 1970s. For same-sex couples, the average age was slightly higher at 38.1 years for men and 33.8 years for women in 2019 (Figure 3).

Over the last two decades, there has been an 8.5% increase in average age for men and a 9.9% increase for women since 1999 (31.6 years for men and 29.4 years for women).

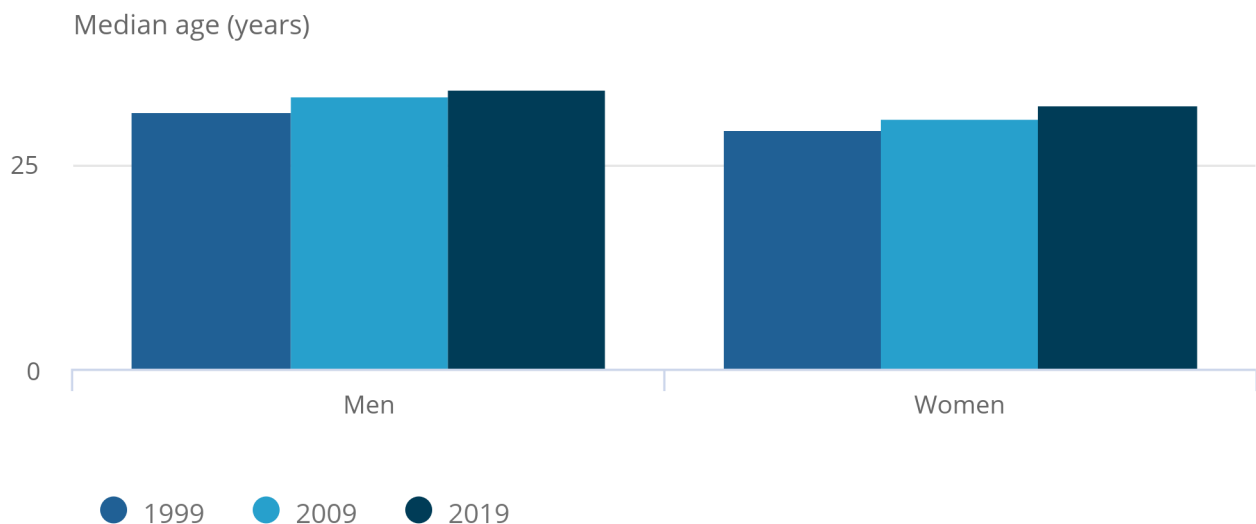
Further changes are discussed in [our blog post, Married by 30? You're now in the minority.](#)

Figure 3: Average age at marriage of opposite-sex couples has steadily increased

Median age of opposite-sex couples at marriage, England and Wales, 1999, 2009 and 2019

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Median age of opposite-sex couples at marriage, England and Wales, 1999, 2009 and 2019



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

Notes:

1. The average (median) age at marriage has been calculated by excluding a very small number of records where the age of the party was not stated.

4 . Type of ceremony

There were 179,905 marriages (81.8%) registered as civil ceremonies in 2019 and less than one in five (18.2%) were religious ceremonies.

For opposite-sex marriages, the percentage of civil ceremonies increased from 78.9% in 2018 to 81.3% in 2019, while religious ceremonies fell from 21.1% in 2018 to 18.7% in 2019. This is the lowest percentage of religious ceremonies on record and continues the overall trend of declining religious marriages. Over the last two decades, there has been a 60.4% decrease in opposite-sex religious ceremonies.

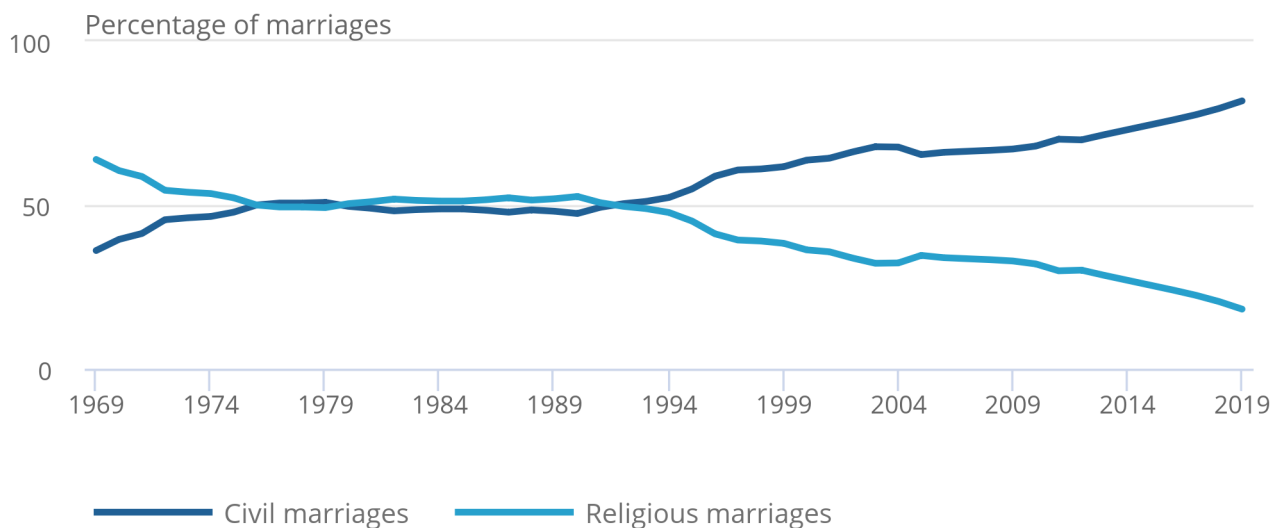
Since 1992, the percentage of civil ceremonies has increasingly outnumbered religious ceremonies (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Civil ceremonies have outnumbered religious ceremonies since 1992

Percentage of civil and religious ceremonies, England and Wales, 1969 to 2019

Figure 4: Civil ceremonies have outnumbered religious ceremonies since 1992

Percentage of civil and religious ceremonies, England and Wales, 1969 to 2019



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

Notes:

1. Figures for 2014 to 2019 include opposite-sex and same-sex marriages.
2. Marriages of same-sex couples have been possible in England and Wales from 29 March 2014.

5 . Marriages by date

The most popular day to get married in 2019 was a Saturday, with August being the most popular month for both opposite-sex and same-sex marriages. Three-quarters (74.6%) of religious marriages took place on a Saturday, whereas 41.9% of civil marriages took place on this day. The most popular date in 2019 to get married was 27 July with 3,628 marriages taking place.

Over the last two decades, the most popular day to get married was 1 September, with an average of 1,552 weddings taking place. During this period, Valentine's Day was the 49th most popular day of the year to get married and saw 1,123 marriages take place. (Figure 5).

Figure 5: August was the most popular month to get married over the last two decades

Average number of marriages per day, England and Wales, 1999 to 2019

[Download the data](#)

6 . First marriages and remarriages

Within opposite-sex couples in 2019, 76.1% of men and 77.1% of women were marrying for the first time. First time marriages among same-sex couples were slightly higher with 89.3% of men and 81.8% of women marrying for the first time.

In 2019, more than two-thirds (67.9%) of all marriages between opposite-sex couples were first marriages for both partners, and 14.7% were among couples where both partners were remarrying. The remainder involved couples where only one partner was previously married.

There has been a gradual decrease in marriages and first marriages overall since the 1970s, whereas the number of remarriages has stayed largely the same with a slight decrease from the mid-2000s (Figure 6).

Figure 6: First and remarriages for opposite-sex couples have generally been declining since the early 1970s

Number (thousands) of first marriages and remarriages of opposite-sex couples, England and Wales, 1950 to 2019

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

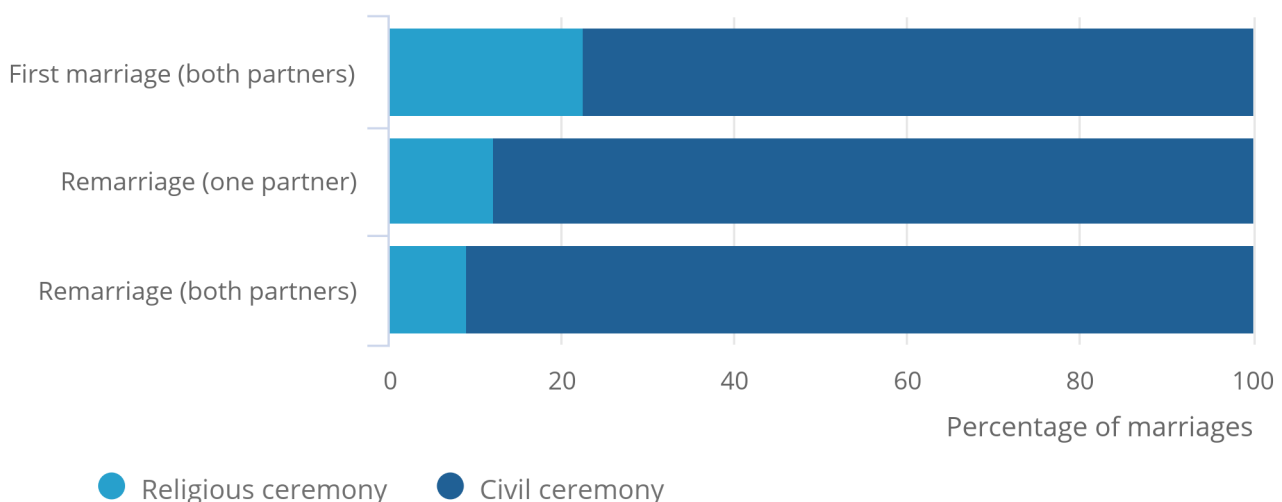
Opposite-sex couples marrying for the first time are more likely to choose a religious ceremony compared with those who remarry. In 2019, 22.5% of those who were marrying for the first time (both partners) chose a religious ceremony whereas 9.0% of those who were remarrying (both partners) chose a religious ceremony (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Religious ceremonies for opposite-sex couples were more popular for first marriages

Percentage of first marriages and remarriages by ceremony type, England and Wales, 2019

Figure 7: Religious ceremonies for opposite-sex couples were more popular for first marriages

Percentage of first marriages and remarriages by ceremony type, England and Wales, 2019



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

7 . Conversions

Same-sex civil partners have been able to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage since 10 December 2014.

There were 578 same-sex civil partnerships converted into marriages in 2019. This is a 28.0% decrease from 803 in 2018. Male couples were more likely to convert their civil partnership into marriages (57.3%) than female couples (42.7%) in 2019.

8 . Marriages in England and Wales data

[Marriages in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 19 May 2022

Annual statistics on the number of marriages that took place in England and Wales analysed by age, sex, previous marital status and civil or religious ceremony.

9 . Glossary

Civil marriage

A civil marriage can take place at a register office or other buildings approved for civil marriage. Both partners must personally give a formal notice of their intention to marry or form a civil partnership to the superintendent registrar of the district(s) where they have resided for the previous seven days.

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

Unmarried population

The unmarried adult population refers to men and women aged 16 years and over who are single (never married), divorced (including those whose previous civil partnership has dissolved) or widowed (including surviving civil partners).

First marriages

First marriages refer to marriages where both partners had never previously been married or formed a civil partnership.

Remarriages

Remarriages refer to marriages where one or both partners were previously married or had formed a civil partnership.

1969 Divorce Reform Act

The Divorce Reform Act 1969, which came into effect on 1 January 1971, made it easier for couples to divorce upon separation and is associated with the increase in the number of divorces during the 1970s.

10 . Measuring the data

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

- Marriage statistics are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement.
- Figures represent civil and religious marriages that took place in England and Wales only.
- Marriages to residents of England and Wales that took place abroad are not included, while marriages that took place in England and Wales to non-residents are included.
- Marriages of same-sex couples first took place on 29 March 2014 and are included in these statistics.
- Same-sex couples in a civil partnership have been able to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage, if they so desired, from 10 December 2014; these are not included in the marriage statistics but are reported separately.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in [our Marriages Quality and Methodology Information report](#).

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

The data in this release relates to the calendar year 2019 and are therefore unaffected by the coronavirus pandemic. Figures for 2020 will not be released until 2023 when we will first report on the impact of the pandemic on the number of marriages and marriage rates.

11 . Strengths and limitations

Our [User guide to marriage statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages and includes a more detailed glossary of terms.

Marriage statistics are compiled to enable the analysis of social and demographic trends. They are also used for considering and monitoring policy changes, most recently the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples.

National Statistics status for Marriages 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: [November 2013](#)

Most recent compliance check that confirms National Statistics status: [November 2013](#).

Improvements since last review:

- Following guidance from the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to improve digital accessibility of statistical spreadsheets, our published datasets from the 2019 data year incorporate this guidance.
- Summary tables have been extended to provide statistics for marriages of same-sex couples and conversions of same-sex civil partnerships.
- We undertook a user [consultation exercise](#) in October 2013 to understand the user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics given the introduction of same sex marriages. The [response to this consultation \(PDF, 102KB\)](#), was published in April 2014.
- Provision of detailed statistics for opposite-sex marriages are available in an [explorable dataset](#) for the 2001 data year onwards and for same-sex marriages from 2014 onwards in an [explorable dataset](#).

Timeliness of marriages in England and Wales data

It is currently only possible to publish final annual marriage statistics around 26 months after the end of the reference year because of delays in the submission of religious marriage entries by the clergy and authorised persons. It is estimated that each year around 4% of religious marriage returns received at the Office for National Statistics remain outstanding one year after the reference period. Marriage statistics are published once we consider the annual dataset is acceptably complete.

The introduction of the [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc.\) Act 2019](#) (which came into force on 4 May 2021) is expected to reduce the delay in submission of religious marriage entries and therefore improve the timeliness of future marriage statistics.

Comparability

Marriage statistics are comparable between countries within the UK. More information on comparability, including comparability with survey data sources, is contained in the [our Marriages Quality and methodology information release](#).

12 . Related links

[Explorable datasets for marriages in England and Wales](#)

Publication | Released 26 May 2021

Datasets providing detailed marriage statistics by age group, marital status, type of marriage, type of ceremony and area of occurrence for 2001 to 2018.

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

Article | 18 July 2017

This article discusses changing relationships patterns at older ages in England and Wales and why older people are getting married and divorced in greater numbers.

[Marriage statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

Webpage | 31 March 2022

Annual marriage statistics for Northern Ireland for 2020 and earlier years by age, marital status, type of marriage and local government district.

[Marriage statistics for Scotland](#)

Webpage | 29 June 2021

Annual marriage and civil partnership statistics for Scotland for 2020 and earlier years by council area and country of residence of parties.

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangement](#)

Bulletin | 16 December 2021

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

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

Bulletin | 03 December 2021

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