

# Marriages and civil partnerships in England and Wales QMI

Quality and methodology information for marriage and civil partnership formation statistics, detailing the strengths and limitations of the data, methods used and data uses and users.

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# 1 . Output information

- Accredited official statistics: yes
- Survey name: Marriages and civil partnerships in England and Wales
- Data collection: registration data
- Frequency: annual
- How compiled: based on third-party data
- Geographic coverage: England and Wales

## 2 . About this QMI report

This quality and methodology information report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data (including the European Statistical System's five dimensions of quality) as well as the methods used to create it.

The information in this report will help you to:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- understand the methods used to create the data
- help you to decide suitable uses for the data
- reduce the risk of misusing data

## 3 . Important points

- Marriage and civil partnership formation statistics are derived from information recorded when legal partnerships are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement; these data represent the best and most complete data source.
- Figures represent legal partnerships formed between couples in England and Wales.
- Legal partnerships to residents of England and Wales that took place elsewhere are not included, while legal partnerships that took place in England and Wales to non-residents are included.
- Civil partnerships are available from 2005 for same-sex couples (introduced on 21 December 2005) and 2019 for opposite-sex couples (introduced on 31 December 2019); marriages are available from 1837 for opposite-sex couples and 2014 for same-sex couples (introduced 29 March 2014).
- The introduction of the [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#), which came into effect on 27 February 2023, increased the minimum age of marriage and civil partnership to 18 years in England and Wales, while the minimum age in Scotland and Northern Ireland remains 16 years.
- Data for Scotland are published in The [National Records of Scotland's \(NRS's\) marriage and civil partnership statistics](#); for Northern Ireland, they are published in the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's \(NISRA's\) marriage statistics](#) and [civil partnership statistics](#).
- Same-sex couples in a civil partnership have been able to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage since 10 December 2014 (these are not included in the marriage statistics but are reported separately in the datasets); opposite-sex couples, who were first able to form a civil partnership in England and Wales on 31 December 2019, are currently unable to convert their civil partnership into a marriage.

## 4 . Quality summary

### Overview of marriages and civil partnerships in England and Wales data

The registration of marriages and civil partnerships taking place in England and Wales is carried out by the Local Registration Service, in partnership with the General Register Office (GRO). Legally, a marriage takes place in either a civil or religious ceremony, while a civil partnership takes place in a civil ceremony; each ceremony is recorded in a register.

We have previously published civil partnership and marriage statistics, which are required to be laid before Parliament, separately. This is usually one to two years after the end of the reference year because of data availability. Data for 2023 are the first we have published concurrently.

Marriage and civil partnership formation data are available for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

Our marriage and civil partnership statistics report annual figures for marriages and civil partnerships that took place in England and Wales for a calendar year. The statistics are produced by:

- sex
- age
- same-sex and opposite-sex
- period of occurrence
- previous legal partnership status
- area of occurrence
- cohabitation status (marriages only)
- type of ceremony (civil or religious) (marriages only)
- day and date of occurrence (marriages only)
- month of occurrence (civil partnerships only)

We altered the geographical coverage of our annual civil partnership statistical data from UK to England and Wales, from the 2014 data year onwards. This alteration came after respondents to our [civil partnership consultation](#) almost unanimously supported the proposal for changing coverage, to allow for more timely civil partnership statistics for England and Wales.

Our [User guide to marriage statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages, some of which also relate to civil partnerships.

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) has published a [Marriage and civil partnership table](#) that sets out the similarities and differences between marriage and civil partnerships in England and Wales.

## Uses and users

Our marriage and civil partnership statistics are used widely to inform policy development across a number of organisations. This section includes a sample of the groups who use our statistics, not a complete list.

### Women and Equalities Unit

The [Women and Equalities Unit](#) leads on the Equality Act 2010, including on gender, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in government. They use our marriage and civil partnership statistics to inform policymaking.

### Department for Work and Pensions

The [Department for Work and Pensions \(DWP\)](#) uses legal partnership data to feed into [dynamic simulation models](#) covering the pension-age population to model:

- pensioner incomes
- entitlement to state pensions
- pension-age benefits

This involves modelling whole life courses, including the formation and dissolution of partnerships (marriage, civil partnerships and cohabitation).

## Government Actuary's Department

The [Government Actuary's Department \(GAD\)](#) uses legal partnership data to estimate the cost of requiring pension schemes to equalise benefits for same-sex partners with opposite-sex partners required under the [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#). GAD are asked to provide estimates of costs in relation to pension schemes (often for government departments). Where pension scheme data are unavailable, our statistics are often used to inform the assumption-setting process.

### Other uses and users

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

Organisations in the voluntary sector use our legal partnership statistics for comparative purposes and to support campaigns. They often pass on our marriage statistics to their own users. For example, the [Marriage Foundation](#) hold an annual Marriage Week to promote stable relationships through marriage.

Businesses involved in marriages or civil partnerships, such as hotels, catering businesses, bridal shops, wedding and civil partnership celebration planners use our legal partnership statistics by area to assess their market share of business and for marketing and commercial planning

Religious groups and organisations such as the [Church of England \(PDF, 1.7 MB\)](#) are interested in marriage statistics by area and the number of religious marriages taking place each year

Lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law use marriage, divorce and civil partnership data to comment on trends in case law. They also use these data to predict likely future trends in legal business, such as divorce and dissolution cases, inheritance and [family law](#).

Academics and researchers for organisations such as [Relate](#), use marriage, divorce and civil partnership data for research into family change, as well as assessing the implications of partnership trends for:

- care
- childbearing,
- housing
- finances in later life or old age

Organisations covering gay and lesbian rights and equality issues use legal partnership statistics to support their campaigns and pass on the data to their own users. The [Centre for Social Justice](#) regularly publishes reports on family policy that use our marriage, divorce or civil partnership figures.

Our statistics are also used to inform and develop government policy and law, such as the [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#), which increased the minimum age of marriage and civil partnerships to 18 years in England and Wales from 27 February 2023.

They are also used in government debates and briefings, such as the [Commons Library analysis of Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Bill](#).

### 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.

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

### Recent changes and improvements

- The [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration Etc.\) Act 2019](#) (which came into force on 4 May 2021) introduced a new electronic registration system to replace the paper marriage register and has reduced the delay in submission of religious marriage entries.
- The [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#) has increased the minimum age of marriage and civil partnerships to 18 years in England and Wales from 27 February 2023; this change will be reflected in our future marriages releases.
- For the first time, we have published marriages and civil partnership formation statistics together in one bulletin.

## 5 . Quality characteristics of the data

### Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets users' needs for both coverage and content.

Our annual legal partnership publications consist of a statistical bulletin that provides commentary on the latest calendar year statistics, and summary datasets that provide time series for comparison.

The marriages time series is available on a comparable basis back to 1837 in some tables. In addition, we publish [explorable datasets via Nomis](#), which can be used to obtain more detailed user-defined statistics for a particular calendar year.

From 2016, the format of our annual marriage publication changed (2012 data year onwards) to the current format. This was the result of [findings from a consultation to understand user requirements](#).

### Accuracy and reliability

The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.

The marriage and civil partnership formation statistics we publish use data taken directly from the Registration Online (RON) system. The RON entry is the legal record for a marriage or civil partnership. The General Register Office (GRO) maintains the system and ensures that:

- all legal partnerships that have taken place are entered into RON
- the data on the records are complete
- any amendments are updated on the system.

A superintendent registrar quality assures registered civil partnerships for each quarter. It is therefore the most complete dataset available for civil partnership formations in England and Wales.

The information in the marriage or civil partnership entry is largely supplied by the persons forming a legal partnership, who are responsible for its accuracy. Supplying false information may render them liable to prosecution for perjury, so 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 resolved by GRO.

Once we extract an annual formations dataset, a number of quality assurance checks are performed. These include frequency checks and comparisons with the previous years' data, as well as a check for duplicates. We also carry out checks to look for inconsistencies in the dataset, to ensure there are minimal internal errors. We use statistical analysis to look at trends in the figures by registration authority over time.

Marriage statistics by type of ceremony (either civil or religious) can be misleading, as some religious marriages (such as 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 can be misleading for some religions, since 2011, we have only published religious denominations under broad groupings.

Revisions of marriage and civil partnership statistics occur when there have been revisions to our [Population estimates by marital status](#) resulting in revised marriage rates. Tables contain notes to show whether any rates have been recalculated since the last publication, using revised population estimates.

There is no legal requirement for the General Register Office (GRO) to register those legal partnerships of persons usually resident in England and Wales that take place outside of England and Wales. However, some overseas legal partnerships are recorded with the overseas section at GRO. These fall into two main types:

- legal partnerships of armed forces personnel
- legal partnerships that take place in UK consulates which offer a consular marriage service (there are around 30 consulates which have this facility)

In total there are approximately 40 consulates which 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.

Although the estimated number of legal partnerships abroad has been high, many users are only interested in legal partnerships taking place in England and Wales. Users with an interest in social change can consult our [population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#).

Each year, some marriages are not included in our published figures because we received the entries later than the date that the annual dataset was taken. This is because of delays in the submission of marriage entries by the clergy and authorised persons.

Table 1 published in our [User guide to marriage statistics](#) shows the difference between the number of marriages stored on our database and the number included in our publications each year. Although this means some marriages are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise that has been taken to publish more timely data. With the introduction of the new electronic registration system, submission delays have been reduced. We continue to work with the GRO to monitor the receipt of marriage registrations. We do not retrospectively update previously published statistics to include the late registrations received.

Before the 2011 data year, if the age of one of the parties was not given, a value for that age based upon the other party's stated age was imputed. From the 2011 data year onwards, missing values for age at marriage have not been imputed. 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 and marital status, these variables are also not imputed. Published tables now include information on the small number of records for which this information is missing.

## Coherence and comparability

Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain, for example, geographic level.

Our marriage and civil partnership statistics have always been produced using data collated by the GRO during the legal registration process. Methods and classifications for marriage statistics have remained similar for many years, and time series data are available on a comparable basis for opposite sex couples back to 1837 in some tables. Statistics for same-sex couples are available from 2014. A time series of civil partnership formations is available for same sex couples from 2005 and for opposite sex couples from 2019.

The number and timing of both marriages and civil partnerships in England and Wales in 2020, 2021 and early 2022 were affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Measures that may have had an impact include:

- closure of hospitality venues
- lockdowns during which legal partnerships were not permitted
- the closure of churches for public worship and suspension of face-to-face activities
- restrictions on the number of guests
- rules around social distancing and the wearing of face masks

Statistics are broadly comparable across the UK and internationally. We quality assure marriage data for England and Wales and co-ordinate and publish statistics for the whole of the UK, with breakdowns for each constituent country. Although both the [National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#) and [the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#) publish regular statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) collate all UK data together, allowing users to compare data easily for each country.

Civil partnership formation figures for England and Wales are based on date of formation (the date on which the civil partnership took place). Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are based on date of registration (the date on which the civil partnership is registered by the registrar: this date may be the same as the date of formation or a slightly later date). The impact on statistics is negligible.

From 27 February 2023, the legal minimum age to enter a legal partnership in England and Wales was raised to 18 years. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the minimum legal age remains at 16 years.

Comparability is maximised by the following:



- marriage statistics published by the ONS, NRS and NISRA are all produced using date of marriage
- marriage statistics published by the ONS, NRS and NISRA cover all marriages that were registered as having taken place in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively, regardless of the usual residence of the parties involved
- the ONS, NRS and NISRA marriage statistics do not include marriages of residents of England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland who go abroad to be married; only some of these marriages abroad come to the attention of the Registrar General through notification to consular authorities

We currently publish marriage and civil partnership rates for England and Wales using the unmarried population aged 16 years and over as the denominator (never married or civil partnered, widowed and divorced persons obtained from the population estimates by marital status published by the ONS). Similar marriage rates for Scotland are available up to 2008. NISRA do not produce population estimates by marital status, so marriage rates for Northern Ireland are generally calculated using the population aged 16 years and over as the denominator.

From the 2017 data year, mean and median ages at civil partnership formation for England and Wales are based on integer (whole number) ages. This means that it is the age as of last birthday that is recorded. This is consistent with the calculation of these measures for marriage statistics published for England and Wales. Mean and median ages at civil partnership formation had previously been calculated on the basis of full age, which includes the number of months, until 2016. When using integer ages to calculate mean and median ages, the mean is calculated using integer ages plus 0.5 to estimate exact age, while medians are calculated by interpolating integer ages.

There are no other accredited official statistics produced on marriages or civil partnerships. Our legal partnership statistics are not directly comparable with census and household survey estimates of married or civil partnered people in England and Wales, as they are estimates of the number of people in legal partnerships at a certain point in time, rather than the number that took place during a particular year.

## Accessibility and clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.

Our recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV, Excel, and [NOMIS explorable datasets](#). The latter provides more detailed statistics for a particular calendar year. Our website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances, other software may be used, or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on our website, but not produced by us, or referenced on our website, but stored elsewhere, may vary.

Following guidance from the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to improve the digital accessibility of statistical spreadsheets, our published datasets for marriage statistics from the 2019 data year and civil partnership statistics from the 2020 data year now incorporate and adhere to this guidance. This is to help improve the usability, accessibility and machine readability of our statistical spreadsheets.

For further information please contact [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk).

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to:

- our [terms and conditions](#) (for data on the website)
- our [accessibility statement](#)

Special extracts and tabulations of marriages and civil partnerships 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 via email to [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk) or by telephone on +44 1329 444661. We also publish user requested data.

## Timeliness and punctuality

Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

Figures are usually published approximately twelve months after the reference year to which the data relate.

It was previously only possible to publish final [annual marriage statistics](#) around 26 months after the end of the reference year, because of delays in the submission process. However, following the introduction of the [Marriages, Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration Etc.\) Act 2019](#) (which came into force on 4 May 2021), timeliness has improved.

An electronic registration system has replaced the paper marriage register, and has reduced the delay in submission of religious marriage entries. We monitored the receipt of marriage returns following this change. We found that marriages that took place in 2021 were still being received throughout 2022 and, to a lesser extent, in 2023. However, those marriages that took place in 2022 had a relatively high number of marriage returns received in the first month of 2023, with very small numbers being received throughout the rest of the year.

Marriage statistics are published once we consider the annual dataset is acceptably complete. Marriage records received after our annual dataset is taken are not included in published figures. Table 1 in our [User guide to marriage statistics](#) shows that the difference between the number of marriages stored on our database, and the number included in our publications each year, was less than 0.4% between 2002 and 2018. There was a higher difference for 2019 because of the closure of marriage registers, which prompted the return of a high number of long-outstanding records (more information is available in our user guide). This is a compromise that must be made to publish data that is as timely as possible. We continue to work with the GRO, monitoring the receipt of marriage registrations and sending out reminders where delays are identified.

The annual release of our marriage and civil partnership statistics is announced on the [GOV.UK release calendar](#).

The release of our marriage statistics has been delayed in recent years for the following reasons:

- there have been particular data quality concerns requiring a delay so that late notifications could be included
- to allow for more detailed quality assurance after the introduction of the GRO RON system in January 2011
- reprioritisation of work during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- aligning the publication of marriage and civil partnership statistics to increase coherence for users

The introduction of the new electronic registration system has helped to improve timeliness.

For more detail on related releases, the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) is available online and provides details of release dates. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

## Concepts and definitions

Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output and a description of the classifications used in the output.

The 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 legislations. This reflects the distinct and separate roles of the Registrar General for England and Wales and the UK Statistics Authority. A full glossary and information about the legislations by which the Registrar General and the UK Statistics Authority are guided is available in our [User guide to marriage statistics](#).

## Geography

The level of data shown in the datasets is for England and Wales, with some datasets showing data at registration district level. Our registration district tables are presented using the geographic boundaries in place as at April of the latest year for which data are being reported. For Wales, registration districts are coterminous with unitary authority boundaries. For England, registration districts equate to a subset of regions, counties, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities.

Local government boundaries can change at any time.

## 6 . Methods used to produce the data

### How we collect the data, main data sources and accuracy

All legal partnerships registered within England and Wales are recorded on the web-based Registration Online system (RON) and form a legal record. The majority of the details entered into the registers are supplied by the couple marrying, although some information is also provided by the person or people conducting and registering the partnership.

Marriage and civil partnership registration records on RON are transferred to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and into our Life Events Continuity (LEC) database for statistical purposes daily. We perform regular receipt and diagnostic tests and liaise with the General Register Office (GRO) to resolve any issues identified.

More information on how the data are collected can be found in our [User guide to marriage statistics](#).

We also publish marriage rates for England and Wales (combined). "Rates" refer to the number of people marrying per 1,000 unmarried males or females aged 16 years and over. In this context, unmarried means:

- never married or civil partnered
- widowed
- divorced

The same denominator is used in the calculation of rates for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples, because anybody who is unmarried can enter into either an opposite-sex or same-sex marriage.

From 27 February 2023, those aged 16 and 17 years were no longer able to marry or enter a civil partnership in England and Wales, following the introduction of the [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#). This Act increased the minimum age of marriage and civil partnerships to 18 years. We will consider how we take account of this change in future releases.

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#) used in the rates are the latest available when the statistics are published.

### How we process the data

Validation and quality assurance checks are conducted monthly on new registrations received from the GRO via RON. Quality assurance is conducted on annual datasets and any anomalies queried with the GRO. Once all queries have been resolved, and any necessary amendments made, the dataset is used to create the tables for publication.

The majority of our [annual marriage statistics for England and Wales](#) are counts taken from the datasets. Some information is not part of the basic data supplied and is derived as follows:

- type of religious ceremony (denomination) is derived from the place of marriage; since 2011 this has been received on the marriage record
- civil marriage location type (approved premise or register office) is derived from the marriage venue
- a cohabitation indicator is also derived to show whether or not the couple gave the same address at marriage

Up until 2011, the cohabitation indicator was based on whether each partner gave the same address at marriage as we keyed this information. From 2011, the indicator is created using both partners' postcodes. Where the postcodes match, it is assumed that the couple were cohabiting before marriage. Around 4% of marriage records are missing either one or both postcodes, consequently it is only possible to provide estimates of the percentage of couples cohabiting before marriage.

From 2011, we have used a look-up function to code records where previous legal partnership status or denomination recorded on the marriage entry is equal to "other" when received. Where text fields providing further information show that the previous legal partnership status or denomination should be coded to one of the existing values, the marital status code is amended.

## 7 . Other information

### Assessment of user needs and perceptions

- We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of our releases and encourage users to send feedback by email to [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk).
- Feedback is requested with all emails sent by the stakeholder engagement team and as part of our annual marriages and civil partnerships release each year.

A consultation to understand [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics \(Word, 185.3 KB\)](#) following the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples was published in October 2013; information provided has been used to help us meet user needs as much as possible, and a [summary of the responses to the consultation and future plan \(PDF, 103.7KB\)](#) was also published.

## 8 . Related links

### [User guide to marriage statistics](#)

Methodology | Last revised 18 November 2025

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.

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

Dataset | Released 24 February 2023

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

### [Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales](#)

Bulletin Released 2 July 2025

Annual divorce and civil partnership dissolution numbers and rates, partnership type, to whom granted and duration of marriage.

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

Bulletin | Released 15 October 2025

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

### [Families and households in the UK](#)

Bulletin | Released 23 July 2025

Estimates of families (with and without children) and household types, including people living alone in the UK in 2024.

## 9 . Cite this methodology

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