

Statistical bulletin

Civil partnerships in England and Wales: 2018

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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Table

of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Statistician's comment](#)
3. [Things you need to know](#)
4. [The number of civil partnerships continued to increase in 2018](#)
5. [More than one in five of all civil partnerships formed in 2018 were to those aged 65 and over](#)
6. [London continued to be the most popular place to form a civil partnership](#)
7. [The majority of people entering a civil partnership had never previously married or formed a civil partnership](#)
8. [Civil partnership dissolutions fell by nearly a quarter in the last year](#)
9. [What is the future of civil partnerships?](#)
10. [Links to related statistics](#)
11. [Quality and methodology](#)

1 . Main points

- There were 956 civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2018, an increase of 5.3% compared with 2017; this is the third annual increase following a large decrease between 2013 and 2015 after the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in 2014.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all civil partnerships formed in 2018 were between men, a similar proportion to the previous year (66%).
- In 2018, the average age of women forming a civil partnership (51.6 years) was higher than for men (50.5 years).
- More than one in five (21%) of those entering a civil partnership in 2018 were aged 65 years and over; this compares with just 4% in 2013, prior to the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples.
- London continued to be the most popular region for the formation of civil partnerships; 32% of all formations in England and Wales in 2018 took place in London.
- There were 927 civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2018, a fall of nearly a quarter (24%) compared with 2017.
- More than half (56%) of civil partnership dissolutions in 2018 were to female couples, a similar percentage to previous years.

2 . Statistician's comment

"The number of same-sex couples forming a civil partnership increased slightly in 2018, for the third consecutive year. Just under 1,000 couples preferred this option to marriage. Those choosing to form a civil partnership are more likely to be male or over 50."

"The recent change in the law to make opposite-sex couples eligible to form civil partnerships from the end of this year is likely to bring further increases to the overall number of civil partnerships formed in England and Wales."

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

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3 . Things you need to know

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 between couples of the same sex are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement.
- Figures represent civil partnerships that are formed between couples of the same sex 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 continued to increase in 2018

There were 956 civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2018. This is an increase of 5.3% compared with 908 formations in 2017, and is 7.4% more than the 890 formations in 2016. This was the third consecutive annual increase but formations in 2018 were still only one-sixth of the number seen in 2013, which was the last year before the introduction of same-sex marriage in March 2014.

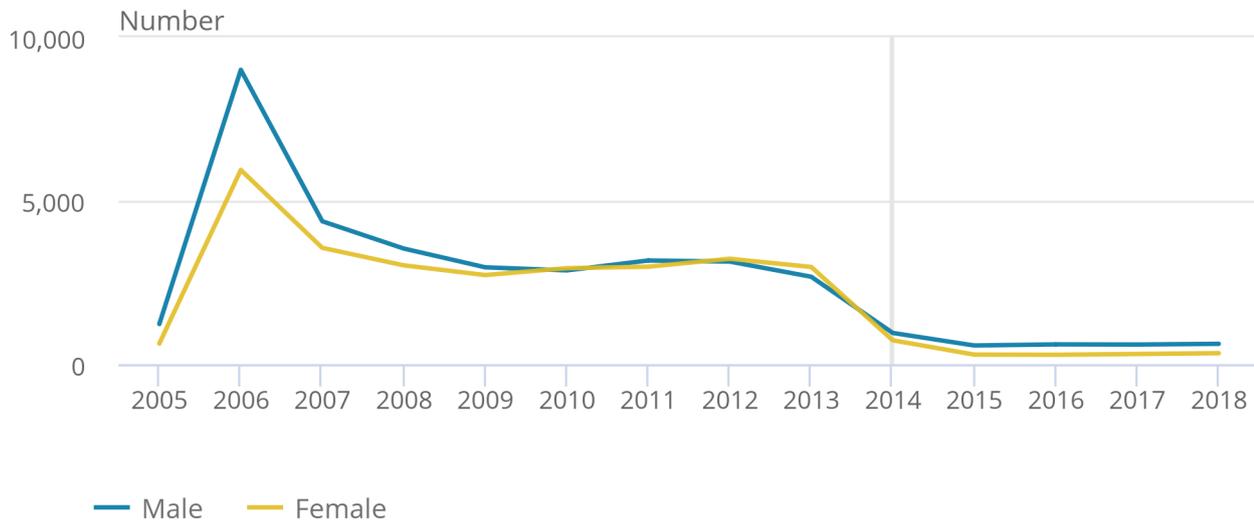
Figure 1: Number of civil partnerships formed in 2018 increased slightly for both male and female couples

Number of civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2018

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Introduction of marriage of same-sex couples (

Number of civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2018



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 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.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all civil partnerships formed in 2018 were between men, a similar proportion to that seen every year since 2015, and in 2005 when the first civil partnerships took place (Figure 2). In contrast, our latest [statistics on marriages](#) show that less than half (44%) of marriages of same-sex couples were between men in 2016.

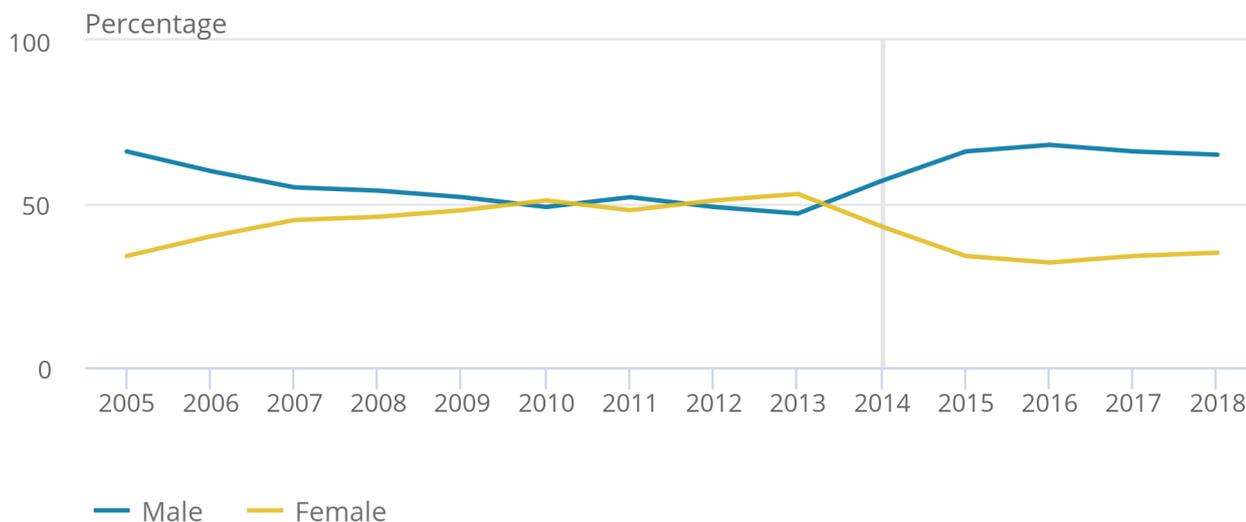
Figure 2: Around two-thirds of civil partnership formations in 2018 were between male couples

Percentage of civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2018

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Introduction of marriage of same-sex couples (2014)

Percentage of civil partnership formations by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2018



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 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 – the proportion of civil partnerships to men fluctuated between 47% and 52%. However, since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in March 2014 and the subsequent reduction in the number of civil partnerships, the proportion of these partnerships being formed by male couples has increased. This is likely to be, in part, a result of more female same-sex couples choosing to marry compared with male couples; our latest [marriage statistics](#) show that 56% of all same-sex marriages in 2016 were between female couples.

5 . More than one in five of all civil partnerships formed in 2018 were to those aged 65 and over

Couples still choosing civil partnerships since the introduction of same-sex marriages are more likely to be men and more likely to be older. In 2018, over one in five (21%) of all people forming a civil partnership were aged 65 years or over. This is the same proportion as in 2017 but very different to the 4% seen in 2013, the year prior to the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples (Figure 3).

There has also been a noticeable increase in the proportion of individuals forming a civil partnership at age 50 years and over. In 2018, more than half (54%) of those entering a civil partnership were aged 50 years and over compared with only 19% in 2013.

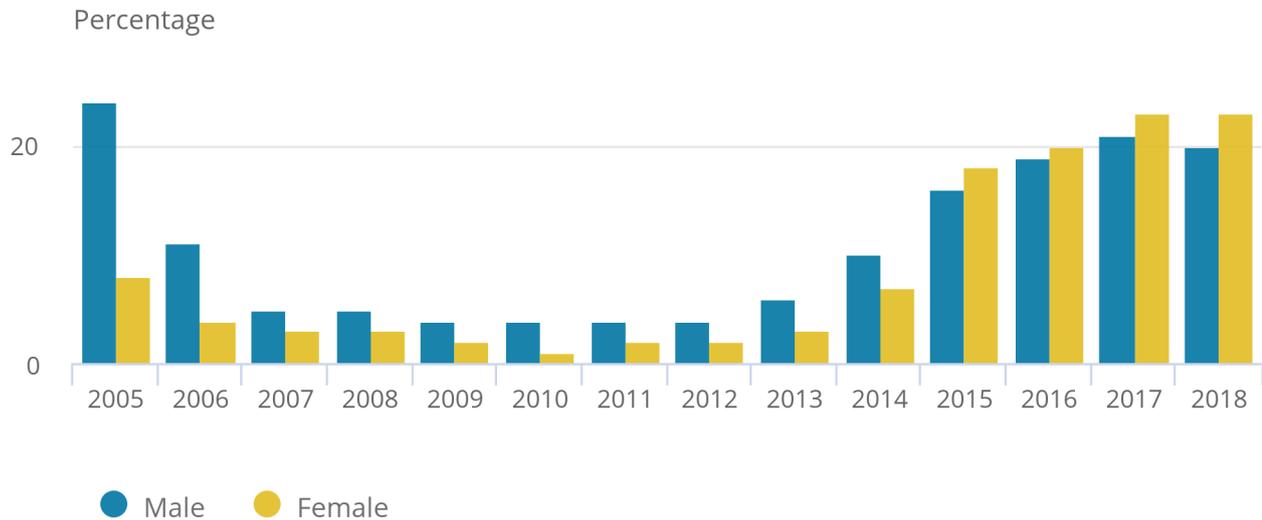
This increasing proportion of civil partnerships formed at older ages reflects the greater popularity of same-sex marriages among those of younger ages, who otherwise may have formed a civil partnership. Our 2016 [marriage statistics](#) show that nearly all (98%) marriages between same-sex couples were to individuals aged under 65 years and 83% were to individuals aged under 50 years.

Figure 3: The proportion of people aged 65 years and over who are forming civil partnerships has increased in recent years

Percentage of people forming civil partnerships who were aged 65 years and over by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2018

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Percentage of people forming civil partnerships who were aged 65 years and over by sex, England and Wales, 2005 to 2018



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 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 increasing proportion of civil partnerships formed at older ages in recent years has also resulted in a rise in the average (mean) age at the time of civil partnership. In 2018, the average age of individuals forming a civil partnership was 50.9 years compared with 39.3 years in 2013, the year before marriages of same-sex couples were introduced.

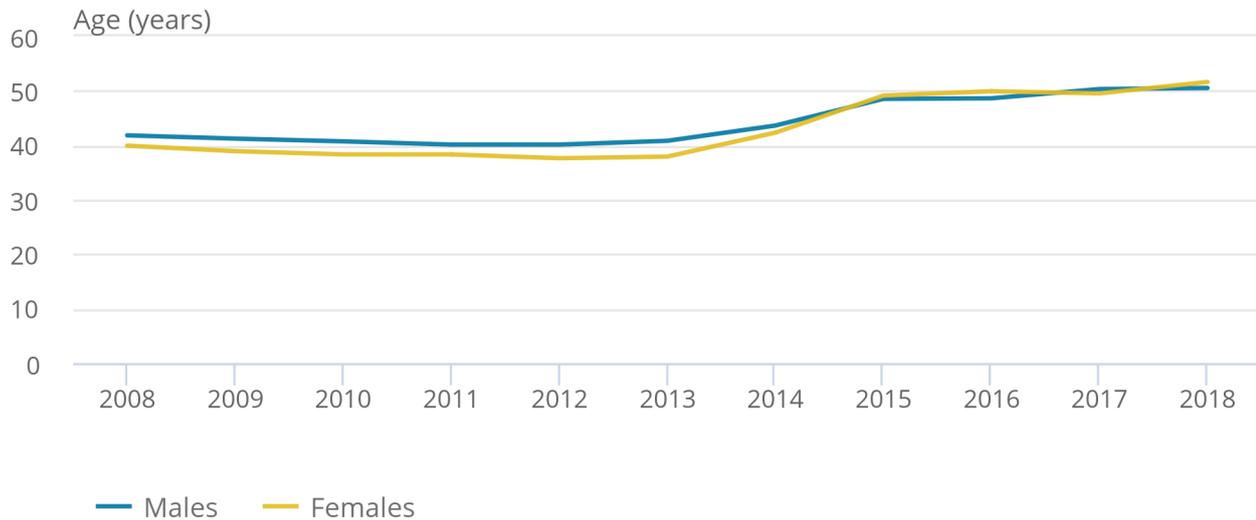
Historically, men have entered civil partnerships at slightly later ages than women, but this pattern has reversed in recent years (Figure 4). In 2018, the average age of women forming a civil partnership (51.6 years) was higher than men (50.5 years), a pattern also seen in 2015 and 2016.

Figure 4: The average age of men and women forming a civil partnership has risen since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples

Average age (years) at civil partnership formation by sex, England and Wales, 2008 to 2018

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Average age (years) at civil partnership formation by sex, England and Wales, 2008 to 2018



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 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. Average age represents the mean age. See the Quality and methodology section for more information about how this is calculated.

6 . London continued to be the most popular place to form a civil partnership

London has consistently been the most popular region in England to form a civil partnership since legislation was introduced in 2005. Of all formations that occurred in England and Wales in 2018, nearly one-third (32%) were in London, with 307 formations in total (223 male and 84 female).

More men than women formed civil partnerships in every region in England in 2018, while in Wales, equal numbers of men and women formed civil partnerships (34 formations in total).

Brighton and Hove continued to have the highest number of civil partnership formations for a local authority in both England and Wales, with a total of 37 formations in 2018 (30 male and seven female). The London boroughs of Islington (21 male and 11 female) and Southwark (15 male and 14 female) were the second and third most popular local authorities respectively. In Wales, the highest number of formations took place in Cardiff with seven formations in 2018 (four male and three female).

7 . The majority of people entering a civil partnership had never previously married or formed a civil partnership

The majority (86%) of individuals who formed a civil partnership in 2018 in England and Wales had never previously entered into a marriage or a civil partnership. This compares with 85% in 2017 and is a similar proportion to that seen in each year since 2005, when civil partnerships were first introduced.

Of the remaining individuals who formed a civil partnership in 2018, 12% were either previously divorced or had a civil partnership dissolved and 2% were previously widowed or a surviving civil partner.

Women forming a civil partnership are more likely to have previously been in a legally recognised relationship compared with men. In 2018, nearly one in five women (18%) who formed a civil partnership were either previously divorced or had a previous civil partnership dissolved compared with only 9% of men (Figure 5). This pattern is also observed for earlier years.

Figure 5: Women forming civil partnerships were more likely to have previously been in a legally recognised relationship

Percentage of males and females forming a civil partnership by previous marital status, England and Wales, 2018

Figure 5: Women forming civil partnerships were more likely to have previously been in a legally recognised relationship

Percentage of males and females forming a civil partnership by previous marital status, England and Wales, 2018



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

Notes:

1. “Never married or civil partnered” refers to people who have previously never married or formed a civil partnership.
2. “Divorced or partnership dissolved” 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.

8 . Civil partnership dissolutions fell by nearly a quarter in the last year

There were 927 civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2018, a noticeable decrease of 24% compared with 2017 when 1,217 dissolutions were granted.

Female couples accounted for more dissolutions in 2018 (56%) than male couples, a pattern seen each year since civil partnership dissolutions were first recorded in 2007 (Figure 6). This is despite the fact that, historically, more men have formed civil partnerships than women (Figure 2).

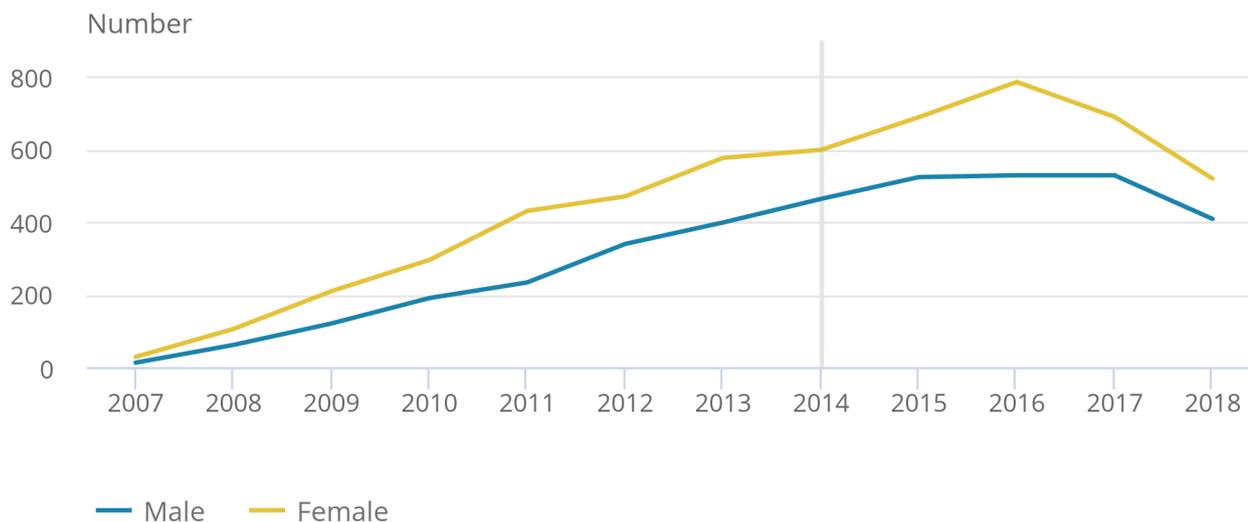
Figure 6: The number of civil partnership dissolutions fell substantially in 2018 compared with the previous year

Number of civil partnership dissolutions by sex, England and Wales, 2007 to 2018

Figure 6: The number of civil partnership dissolutions fell substantially in 2018 compared with the previous year

Introduction of marriages of same-sex couples (2014)

Number of civil partnership dissolutions by sex, England and Wales, 2007 to 2018



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.

This is the second consecutive year that the number of dissolutions has fallen and reflects, in part, the decline in the number of civil partnerships formed since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in March 2014, as many same-sex couples choose to marry instead. This, together with the option for civil partners to convert their civil partnership into a marriage from December 2014, is likely to have led to an overall decrease of the civil partnered population and therefore fewer dissolutions taking place. Our latest [marriage statistics](#) show that between 2014 to 2016, there were 18,362 marriages to same-sex couples and 13,230 civil partnerships were converted to a marriage.

9 . What is the future of civil partnerships?

The [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registration etc.\) Act 2019](#) received Royal Assent on 26 March 2019. The Act requires the government to make regulations by 31 December 2019 to make couples of the opposite sex eligible to form civil partnerships, thus addressing the difference in the treatment of same and opposite-sex couples. This will only apply to England and Wales. This Act also requires the government to consult on rights relating to conversion between civil partnership and marriage, and vice versa.

The government is committed to changing the law by 31 December 2019 to make opposite-sex couples eligible to form civil partnerships. This [Civil Partnerships - Next Steps and Consultation on Conversion](#) policy paper outlines the government's plans for extending eligibility and the range of rights and entitlements that should be made available to opposite-sex civil partners. The statutory [consultation](#), which ran from 10 July 2019 to 20 August 2019, sought users' views on the future of conversion rights. The outcome of this may impact the civil partnership formation and dissolution statistics that we produce in the future.

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 [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages](#). 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 or telephone: +44 (0) 1329 444110. We also publish [user requested data](#).

11 . Quality and methodology

This is the first time that 2018 civil partnership statistics for England and Wales have been published. Civil partnerships formed in England and Wales in 2018 but received by us after 9 April 2019 are not included in this bulletin. Similarly, civil partnership dissolutions received after 25 July 2019 are not included.

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 age last birthday and adjusted to estimate for exact age. This calculation assumes that the ages are evenly spread between successive single years of age. Average age is not standardised and therefore does not take account of the structure of the population by age.

