

Statistical bulletin

Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales: 2023

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

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Correction

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The data download for Figure 1 has been corrected after publication. The data download for figure 2 from the 2022 release was included in error. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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1 . Main points

- In 2023, there were 103,816 legal partnership dissolutions, comprising of both divorces (102,678) and civil partnership dissolutions (1,138); a similar number of annual cases granted to pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels.
- In 2023, 74.2% of divorces (76,164) and 67.9% of dissolutions (773) were granted under the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act; an increase from 2022, where 9.2% of divorces and 10.3% of dissolutions were granted under the new legislation.
- In 2023, 73.1% of final orders granted under the new legislation were sole applications, including 73.3% of divorces and 53.8% of civil partnership dissolutions.
- In 2023, divorce rates per 1,000 married individuals were 8.6 for men and 8.5 for women (including opposite and same-sex couples); same-sex civil partnership dissolution rates were 7.4 for men and 11.2 for women per 1,000 civil partners.
- In 2023, the median duration of marriages that ended in divorce (the mid-point of all durations) was 12.7 years for opposite-sex couples and 7.2 and 6.3 years for male and female same-sex couples respectively.

The number of divorces and dissolutions granted during 2022 will have been affected by the introduction of the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020, and this may have had a continued effect in 2023. The Act came into effect on 6 April 2022 and introduced new mandatory waiting periods at important stages, and other changes, including allowing couples to end a partnership jointly, and the removal of grounds for divorce and dissolution.

2 . Number of divorces and dissolutions

This is the second year that the data includes divorces and dissolutions under new legislation, which came into effect from 6 April 2022, following the [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#). Important changes:

- applicants can apply jointly for divorce, civil partnership dissolution, or judicial separation, as well as individually
- people who are married or in civil partnerships cannot state grounds for divorce, dissolution, or separation (also known as "Facts")
- applicants must wait a minimum of 20 weeks from the start of proceedings until applying for the conditional order

The introduction of the new legislation affected the number and timing of divorces and dissolutions granted in 2022 and may have had a continued effect in 2023, with both old and new law cases being processed. We expect the number of old law cases granted to gradually decline as, with the exception of annulments, only applications made before the change in legislation continue to be processed under the old law.

In 2023, there were 102,678 divorces in total in England and Wales, a return to pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels. The number of dissolutions granted in 2023 was 1,138, the highest number recorded since 2017.

The increase in divorces granted between 2022 and 2023 reflects the lower number of final orders recorded in 2022, following the introduction of the new legislation. The overall number of divorces granted in 2023 is more in line with earlier years and the number of opposite-sex divorces continues to decline over the longer term.

The number of same-sex divorces has increased over time, with the numbers rising in almost every year since they first occurred in 2015. In 2023, there were 1,891 same-sex divorces, the highest annual figure recorded to date. There has also been an increase in the number of same-sex marriages, from 4,850 from when they were first recorded in 2014 to 7,800 in 2022.

Figure 1: The number of divorces and dissolutions has seen a general decrease since the peak in 1993

Number of divorces and dissolutions, England and Wales, 1923 to 2023

Notes:

1. Divorce figures from 2015 include both opposite-sex and same-sex couples.
2. Figures include same-sex dissolutions from 2007 and opposite-sex dissolutions from 2022. The number of dissolutions is very small compared with divorces. In 2023, there were 102,678 divorces and 1,138 dissolutions.
3. The higher number of divorces and dissolutions granted in 2021 may partially reflect delays in the number and timing of divorces granted during 2020 because of disruption in family court activity during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
4. The lower number of divorces in 2022 may partially reflect the introduction of minimum waiting periods, meaning that divorces applied for after 6 April 2022 may take longer to reach final order.
5. More information on each of the marriage and divorce acts referred to in the chart can be found in our [Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

Final orders granted under new legislation

In 2023, 74.2% of divorces (76,164) and 67.9% of dissolutions (773) were granted under the new legislation. This is the second year (and first full year) that the new legislation has been in effect. The proportion of cases granted under the new law has increased significantly, as all new applications, excluding annulments, are now processed under this legislation, rising from just 9.2% of divorces and 10.3% of dissolutions in 2022.

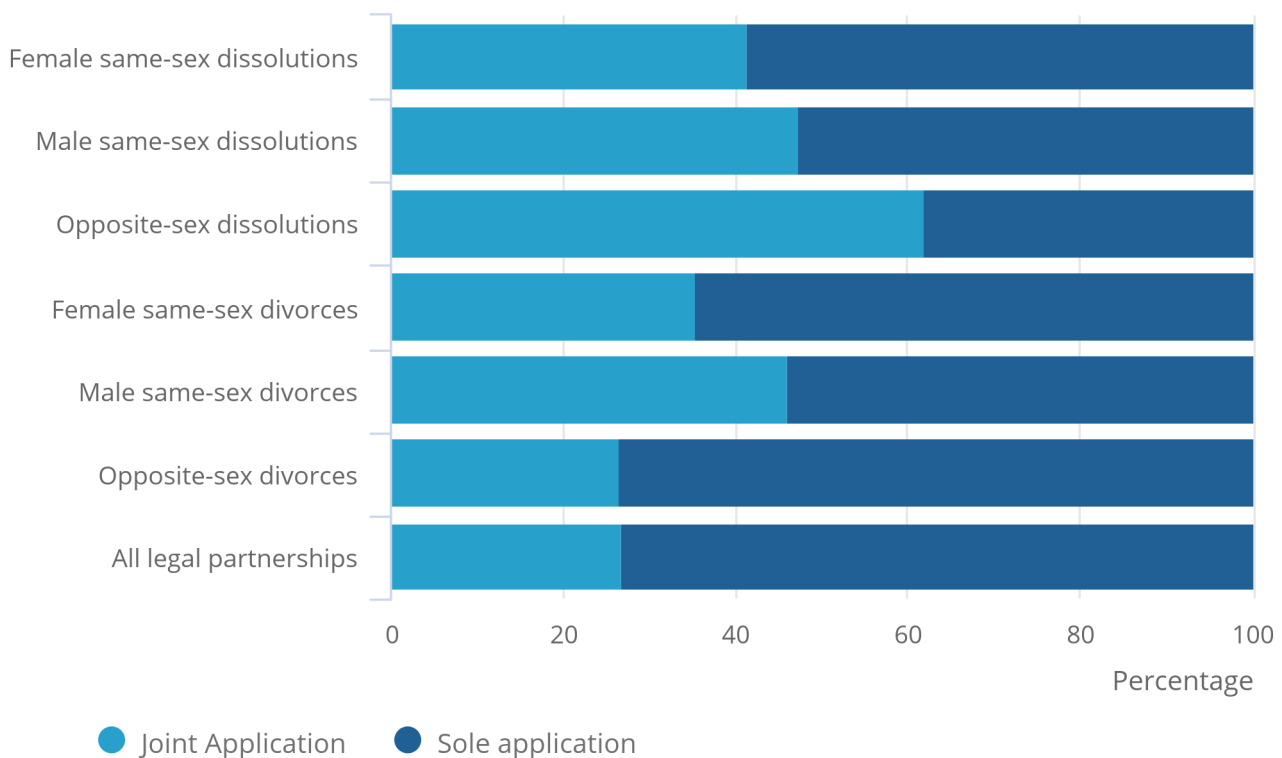
While the new legislation allows applicants to file for divorce or dissolution as joint applicants, in 2023, nearly 3 out of 4 (73.1%) final orders granted under the new legislation were from sole applications.

Figure 2: Divorces had more sole applications than civil partnership dissolutions across all partnership types

Percentage of new law divorces and dissolutions by partnership type and application type, England and Wales, 2023

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Percentage of new law divorces and dissolutions by partnership type and application type, England and Wales, 2023



Source: Divorces in England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics, Dissolutions in England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

In 2023, 73.3% of final divorce orders granted under the new legislation were from sole applications. The highest proportion of sole applications was observed for opposite-sex divorces, at 73.5%, making this the highest proportion across all partnership types.

Among civil partnership dissolutions, 53.8% of final orders granted were from sole applicants. The lowest proportion of sole applications was for opposite-sex civil partnership dissolutions, where 38.1% of final orders were granted to sole applicants. This was the only partnership type where joint applications accounted for more than half of all final orders granted. Because of the relatively small number of opposite-sex civil partnership dissolutions, proportions in this group may be more sensitive to change.

Overall, across all partnership types, divorces had a higher proportion of sole applications than dissolutions.

3 . Divorce and dissolution rates

In 2023, the divorce rate for all couples was 8.6 for men and 8.5 for women per 1,000 of the married population. This is an increase from 2022, where the divorce rate for all couples was 6.7 for men and 6.6 for women per 1,000 of the married population; their lowest level since 1971. This may have been affected by the introduction of the new legislation in April 2022. Divorce rates have declined since their peak in the early 1990s, reflecting a longer-term shift in relationship patterns over the past three decades.

In 1994, [opposite-sex couples married earlier than in more recent years](#), with the median age at marriage of opposite-sex partners being 29.6 years for men and 27.6 years for women. At that time, just over half (59.6%) of opposite-sex couples lived together before getting married.

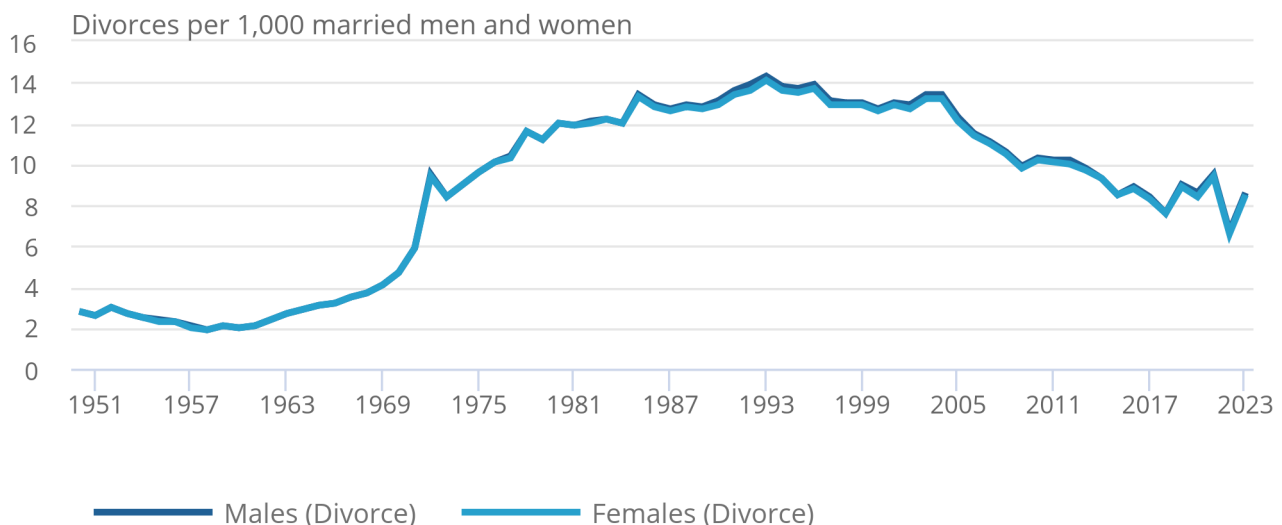
By 2022, opposite-sex couples were marrying later, with the median age at marriage of opposite-sex partners rising to 34.8 years for men and 32.9 years for women. The proportion of opposite-sex couples living together before getting married had also increased, rising to 90.0%.

Figure 3a: Divorce rates have declined since the 1990s, despite recent fluctuations

Divorce rates for males and females per 1,000 of the married population aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, 1950 to 2023

Figure 3a: Divorce rates have declined since the 1990s, despite recent fluctuations

Divorce rates for males and females per 1,000 of the married population aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, 1950 to 2023



Source: Divorces in England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Divorce rates from 2015 include both opposite-sex and same-sex couples.

In 2023, the dissolution rates for same-sex civil partnered couples were 7.4 per 1,000 civil partnered men and 11.2 per 1,000 civil partnered women. Similarly to divorce rates, the dissolution rates for 2023 increased from those in 2022, which may have been affected by the implementation of the new legislation in April 2022.

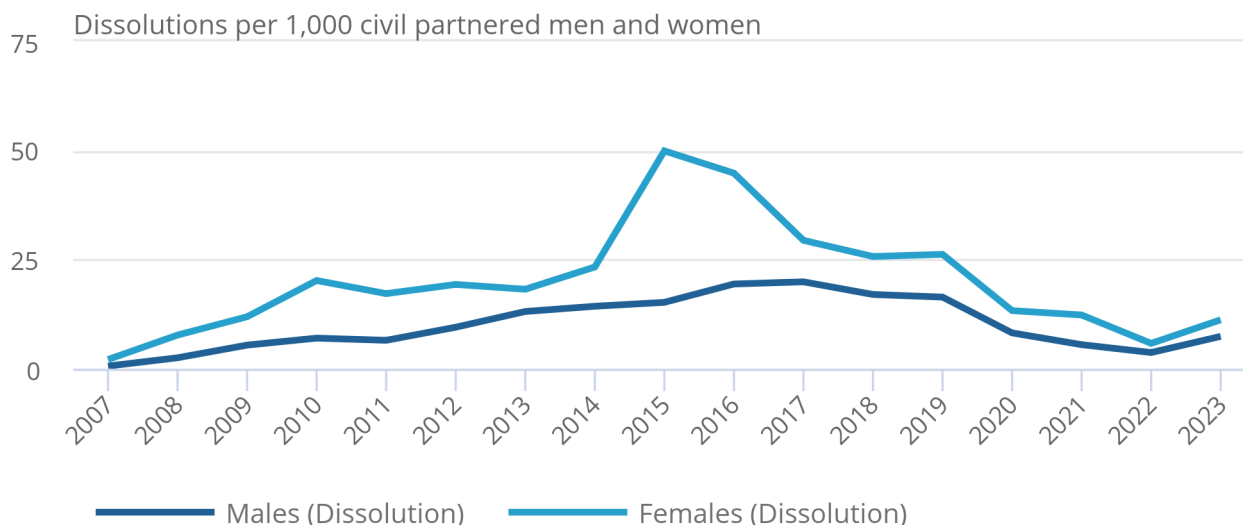
Dissolution rates have decreased notably from their peak levels in 2017 for male couples (19.9 per 1,000 civil partnered males) and in 2015 for female couples (49.9 per 1,000 civil partnered females). Historically, dissolution rates have been higher for female couples than for male couples. This reflects consistently higher numbers of dissolutions among female couples, despite generally lower numbers of civil partnership formations in this group.

Figure 3b: Civil partnership dissolution rates are higher for female couples than for male couples

Dissolution rates for males and females per 1,000 of the civil partnered population aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, 2007 to 2023

Figure 3b: Civil partnership dissolution rates are higher for female couples than for male couples

Dissolution rates for males and females per 1,000 of the civil partnered population aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, 2007 to 2023



Source: Dissolutions in England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Opposite-sex dissolution rates have not been included in this chart because of their relatively small size.

4 . Marriages ending in divorce

Of couples married in 1963, 7.8% had divorced by their 10th wedding anniversary, rising to 22.8% by the 25th (silver) anniversary. In 2023, the 1963 cohort became the first in our records to potentially reach their 60th (diamond) wedding anniversary, with 27.1% of marriages having ended in divorce by this milestone; a figure that has increased minimally from the 50th wedding anniversary (27.0%). At these later anniversaries, the chances of marriages ending in widowhood increases as mortality rates rise with age; in 2022, [nearly half of all people \(47.7%\) aged 80 years and over were estimated to be widowed](#).

Among couples who married in 1998, the most recent cohort in our records to reach their 25th wedding anniversary, a higher proportion divorced in the earlier years of marriage compared with the 1963 cohort. By their 10th wedding anniversary, more than 1 in 5 (23.6%) marriages had ended in divorce, and by their 25th anniversary, this figure had reached 40.7%.

More recently, around 1 in 6 (16.8%) marriages formed in 2013 had ended in divorce by their 10th wedding anniversary. This is lower than the proportion of the 1998 cohort at the same point and continues a broader pattern of decreasing proportions of marriages ending in divorce within the first 10 years among more recent cohorts. However, the level for the 2013 cohort is more than double that recorded for the 1963 cohort by their 10th anniversary.

5 . Duration of marriage

For opposite-sex divorces in 2023, the median duration of marriage at divorce (the mid-point of all durations) was 12.7 years. The 2023 figure remains among the longest median durations recorded and is consistent with the broader pattern of increasing median duration of marriage at the time of divorce over recent decades.

The shortest recorded median duration of marriage was in 1985, at 8.9 years. In 2023, among opposite-sex couples divorcing after less than 30 years of marriage, the most common duration was 6 years, accounting for 5418 divorces.

For same-sex divorces in 2023, the median duration of marriage was 7.2 years for male couples and 6.3 years for female couples. Although there was a small decline in 2023 for male couples, the median duration of marriage at divorce for same-sex couples remains higher than in all years prior to 2022. Overall, the trend since 2015 has been one of gradual increase, though recent years may have been influenced by the introduction of the new legislation in April 2022.

The most common duration of marriage for male same-sex couples in 2023 was 6 years (89 divorces) and 4 years for female same-sex couples (172 divorces). It is possible for the duration of a same-sex marriage to exceed the length of time that same-sex marriage has been legally recognised in England and Wales. This is most likely because of couples converting a civil partnership into a marriage or because of those who formed a same-sex marriage elsewhere before they could do so in England and Wales.

6 . Grounds for divorce

The [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) came into effect during 2022 and included the removal of grounds for divorce (also known as 'Facts'). Information on grounds in 2023 only covers divorces filed under the previous legislation, which accounted for just 25.5% of all final divorce orders and 32.1% of all final dissolution orders granted in 2023.

We expect the number of cases granted under the old legislation to continue to decrease over time.

The most common ground for divorce in 2023 was unreasonable behaviour. Among opposite-sex couples, unreasonable behaviour accounted for 57.5% of old law final orders. This was the most common ground for both female applicants (63.6%) and male applicants (45.2%). Unreasonable behaviour was also the most common ground for divorce among same-sex couples, cited in 62.0% of old law final orders (59.7% for applicants from female same-sex couples and 64.4% for applicants from male same-sex couples).

Read more in our [User guide to divorce statistics](#).

7 . Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales data

[Divorces in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 July 2025

Annual divorce numbers and rates, by duration of marriage, sex, to whom granted and reason, that took place in England and Wales.

[Civil partnership dissolutions](#)

Dataset | Released 2 July 2025

This dataset provides statistics on civil partnership dissolutions that took place in England and Wales analysed by sex and quarter of occurrence.

[Explorable dataset for divorces in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides statistics on divorces between opposite-sex couples, that took place in England and Wales, broken down by the year of occurrence, Fact proven (old law cases only), applicant and duration of marriage.

8 . Glossary

Annulment

An annulment of marriage or civil partnership occurs following a successful application for nullity. It declares that the marriage or civil partnership itself is void (that no valid marriage or civil partnership ever existed) or voidable (was legal at time of registration but is no longer legal). Previously referred to as "decree of nullity" and now known as "nullity order".

Applicant

The person or persons seeking a divorce, dissolution or annulment. Previously referred to as a petitioner.

Facts proven

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 came into effect on 6 April 2022. Before this, a petitioner had to prove one or more Facts (including unreasonable behaviour, desertion, separation, either with or without consent of the respondent and adultery) to establish the irretrievable breakdown of the legal partnership.

HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS)

The [HM Courts and Tribunals Service \(HMCTS\)](#) is an executive agency of the [Ministry of Justice \(MoJ\)](#) and is responsible for the running of most of the courts and tribunals in England and Wales. HMCTS supplies information on divorces and dissolutions to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Median

The median duration of marriage at divorce is the middle value when the data are arranged in increasing order. The median is used, rather than the mean, because the duration of marriage for divorces is not symmetrically distributed. Therefore, the median provides a more accurate reflection of the average duration of marriage.

Petitioner

The person seeking a dissolution or annulment prior to 6 April 2022. Now known as an applicant.

Respondent

The person who is served an application for divorce or dissolution.

Our [User guide to divorce statistics](#) contains a more detailed glossary.

9 . Data sources and quality

This release provides final annual divorce and dissolution statistics for England and Wales for 2023.

Divorce and dissolution statistics are derived from information recorded by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) during the divorce and dissolution process. Annulments are processed under the previous legislation and are for marriages and civil partnerships that were void or not legally valid in the first place, as explained in the GOV.UK article, [Annul a marriage](#). Divorce and dissolution statistics do not include couples who separate but do not divorce or dissolve their civil partnership.

Divorces and dissolutions for legal partnerships that took place abroad are included, provided the legal partnership was legally recognised in the England and Wales and one of the parties had a permanent home in England and/or Wales.

More quality and methodology information

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

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

Our [Revisions policy for population and international migration statistics \(including divorce statistics\)](#) is available.

Comparability

Divorce and dissolution statistics are broadly comparable between countries within the UK; more information on comparability is contained in our [Divorces and dissolutions Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

Divorce and dissolution statistics tell us the number of divorces and dissolutions that take place during a particular year. They are not comparable with estimates from the census or from household surveys on the overall number of divorcees or people who have previously dissolved a civil partnership in the population.

Calculation of rates

Divorce rates have been calculated using the total married population (both opposite-sex and same-sex couples) and dissolution rates have been calculated using the total civil partnered population (both opposite-sex and same-sex couples) from our [Population estimates by marital status bulletin](#).

While the actual number of males and females in opposite-sex couples getting divorced or dissolving civil partnerships in a particular year is equal, the number of married or civil partnered males and females can differ. This is because one partner could live away, either overseas or in a communal establishment, such as a care home or prison. For this reason, divorce and dissolution rates for males and females in opposite-sex couples may be different for a particular year.

Accredited Official Statistics

These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in April 2012. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled "accredited official statistics".

10 . Related links

[Divorce and dissolution statistics for Scotland](#)

Publication | Released 30 April 2024

Statistics on civil-law cases in the Scottish courts together with other related information, such as statistics from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey.

[Divorce statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

Webpage | Released 6 February 2025

Divorce statistics for Northern Ireland based on decree absolute data provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

[Dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

Webpage | Released 6 February 2025

Dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland based on decree absolute data provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

[Divorce statistics for Europe](#)

Article | Released 7 August 2023

This article presents developments that have taken place in relation to family formation and dissolution through an analysis of marriage and divorce indicators for the EU-27 countries.

[Marriages in England and Wales: 2021 and 2022](#)

Statistical Bulletin | Released 20 June 2024

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

[Civil partnerships in England and Wales: 2022](#)

Statistical Bulletin | Released 29 February 2024

Number of civil partnership formations in England and Wales analysed by age, sex, previous legal partnership status and registration area.

11 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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