

Statistical bulletin

# Marriages in England and Wales: 2014

Numbers of marriages that took place in England and Wales analysed by a range of characteristics including age, sex, previous marital status and ceremony type (civil or religious).



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# 1 . Main points

- There were 247,372 marriages between opposite sex couples in 2014, an increase of 2.7% from 2013; but 6.2% lower than in 2012.
- There were 4,850 marriages between same sex couples in 2014; marriages of same sex couples have only been possible since 29 March 2014.
- In 2014, civil ceremonies among opposite sex couples increased by 4.1%, while religious ceremonies decreased by 0.8% compared with 2013.
- Same sex couples mostly solemnised their marriages in civil ceremonies, there were only 23 religious ceremonies accounting for 0.5% of all marriages of same sex couples.
- In 2014, of all individuals marrying a same sex partner 85% were forming their first legally recognised partnership compared with 76% for opposite sex couples.
- There were 2,411 same sex couples who converted their civil partnership into a marriage between 10 and 31 December 2014.

## 2 . Statistician's comment

“The number of marriages of opposite sex couples increased by 2.7% in 2014, but this followed a drop of 8.6% in 2013. Marriage rates for opposite sex couples remain below the levels recorded between 2010 and 2012. Following the introduction of marriages of same sex couples in March 2014, 1 in 46 marriages that year were between same sex couples. Men and women marrying same sex partners, were on average, around 2 years older than those marrying opposite sex partners.”

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics

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## 3 . Things you need to know about this release

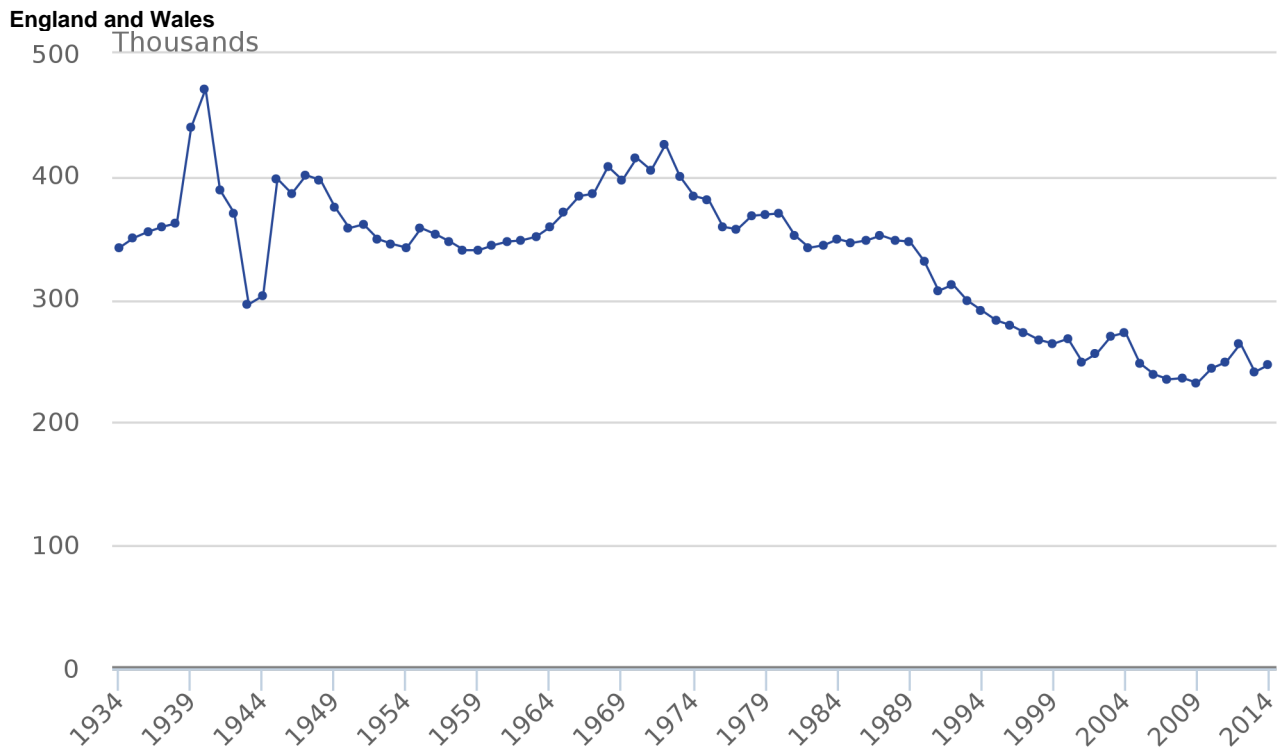
- Marriage statistics are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement.
- Figures represent civil and religious marriages that took place in England and Wales only.
- Marriages to residents of England and Wales that took place abroad 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. Provisional statistics on marriage of same sex couples were published in [August 2014](#) and [October 2015](#).

## 4 . Marriages between opposite sex couples rise in 2014

There were 247,372 marriages between opposite sex couples in England and Wales in 2014, a 2.7% increase compared with 2013; this results from a 4.1% rise in civil marriages coupled with a 0.8% decline in religious marriages.

The increase in the number of marriages in 2014 follows an 8.6% decline in 2013. Consequently, the number of marriages in 2014 remains below the number recorded in 2011 and 2012 (Figure 1a).

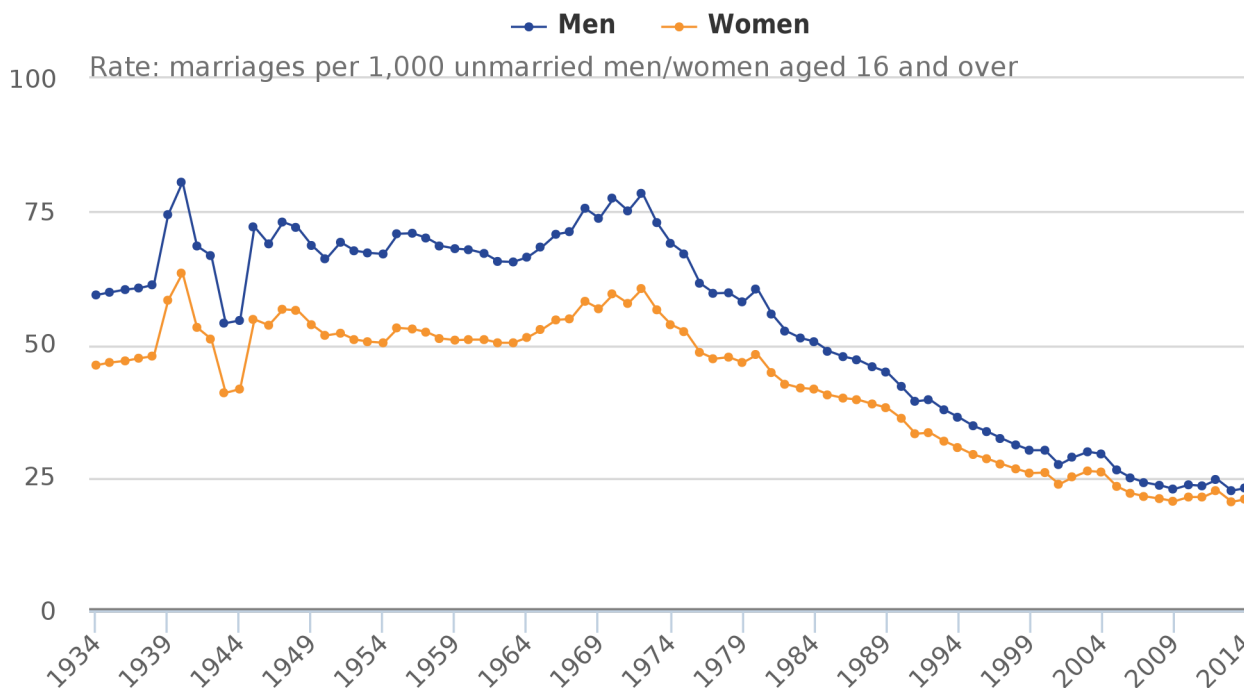
**Figure 1a: Number of marriages, 1934 to 2014**



Source: Office for National Statistics

**Figure 1b: Marriages rates for men and women, 1934 to 2014**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. [The certificate of approval scheme](#) under the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004 came into effect 1 February 2005, to prevent the use of marriage to circumvent UK immigration control ('sham marriages'). This scheme was abolished on 9 May 2011.
2. The marriage rate shows the number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried males/females aged 16 and over.

Marriage rates provide a better indication of trends than simply looking at the number of marriages. This is because they take account of changes in the size of the unmarried adult population, as well as the number of marriages. Marriage rates show the number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and women aged 16 and over.

In 2014, marriage rates increased for both men and women compared with 2013 (Figure 1b); the increase in rates is smaller than the decrease recorded in 2013. Consequently rates remain below levels recorded between 2010 and 2012.

One possible reason behind the fall in the number of marriages and the rates in 2013 was considered to be couples postponing their marriage to avoid unlucky number 13. Given that the number and rates in 2014 have risen, this is still likely to have been a factor. However, since the number and rates have not exceeded, or even returned to 2012 levels, other factors are also likely to have influenced this fall.

More information on the long-term decline in marriages and marriage rates between 1972 and 2009 is available in [Marriages in England and Wales 2013](#); factors which may have influenced the increase in marriages and the overall marriage rates from 2010 to 2012 are also outlined.

The percentage of men and women who have ever married has been declining over recent decades along with the percentage of men and women who have ever remarried. More explanation of these trends are available alongside the [data](#).

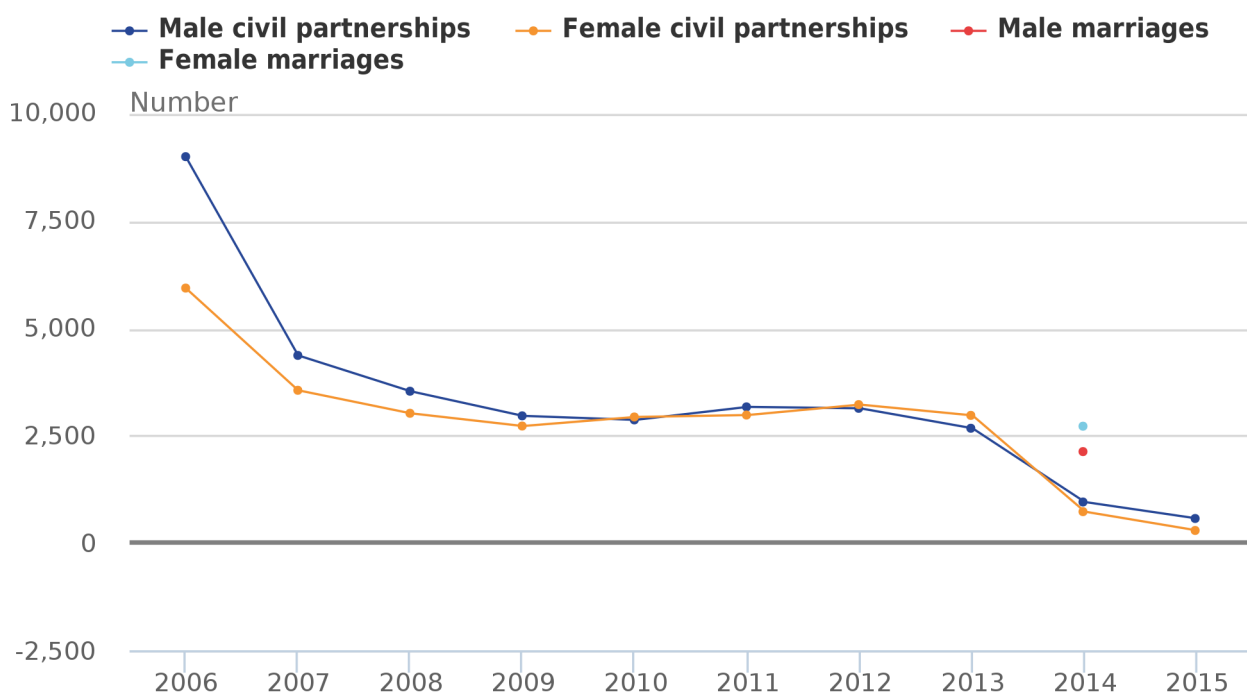
## 5 . More females than males married a partner of the same sex

A total of 4,850 marriages were formed between same sex couples in 2014. Of these, 44% (2,129) were between male couples and 56% (2,721) were between female couples.

Marriages of same sex couples have only been possible since 29 March 2014; taking this into account, the number of marriages of same sex couples in 2014 is considered to be similar to the number of civil partnerships formed in the year prior to the change in legislation. In 2013, there were 5,646 civil partnerships formed between same sex couples with 47% of these being between male couples and 53% between female couples. Between 2009 and 2013, the numbers of men and women forming civil partnerships in a year were relatively even; female couples accounted for between 48% and 53% of all civil partnerships each year (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Number of marriages of same sex couples and civil partnerships, 2006 to 2015**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

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. Civil partnerships still remain available to same sex couples following the introduction of marriages for same sex couples.
2. An announcement was made in December 2013 that marriages of same sex couples could be formed in England and Wales from 29 March 2014.
3. Marriage figures for 2015 are due to be published in autumn-winter 2017.

## **6 . The percentage of religious ceremonies continues its long-term decline**

Religious ceremonies accounted for 28% of marriages between opposite sex couples and 0.5% of marriages between same sex couples in 2014. Only 23 same sex couples married through religious ceremonies in 2014; not all religious organisations conduct marriages of same sex couples.

The percentage of opposite sex couples marrying through religious ceremonies has decreased steadily over time. In 1964, religious ceremonies accounted for 69% of all marriages. However since 1992, civil marriages have consistently outnumbered religious marriages every year.

Most civil marriages take place in approved premises (buildings such as hotels, historic buildings and stately homes licensed for civil marriages); in 2014, of all civil marriages, 88% of opposite sex couples and 87% of same sex couples married in approved premises. Civil marriages not held in approved premises are conducted in a register office.

There has been a continual increase in the percentage of opposite sex couples marrying in approved premises, coinciding with a rise in the number of approved premises available since their introduction in 1995.

## **7 . Same sex male couples are most likely to be forming their first legally recognised partnership**

In 2014, of all men and women marrying a partner of the opposite sex 76% were marrying for the first time. In comparison, 85% of men and women marrying a partner of the same sex were forming their first legally recognised partnership – they had never previously married or been in a civil partnership.

Two-thirds (67%) of marriages between opposite sex couples in 2014 were the first marriage for both partners, unchanged from 2013; this percentage has increased steadily from a recent low of 58% in 2000. Among same sex couples, 81% of marriages between males and 68% between females were the first legally recognised partnership for both partners.

## **8 . At what age are couples getting married?**

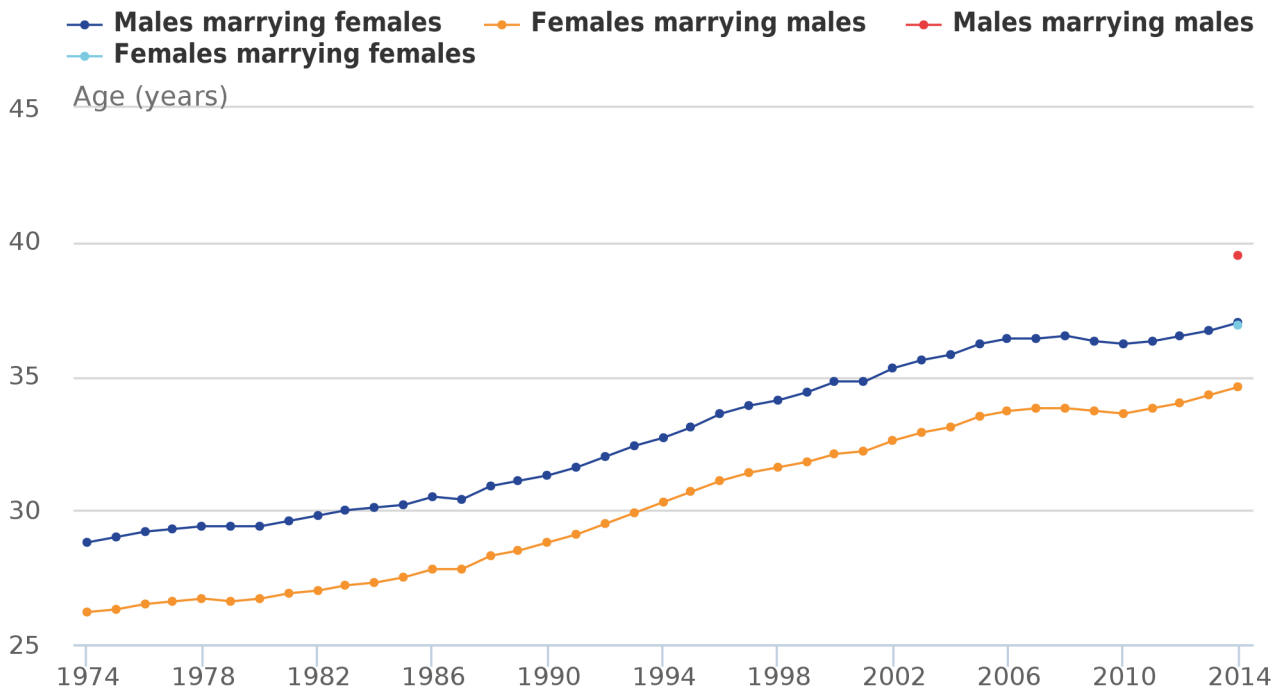
Among opposite sex couples, more women than men married at ages under 30; at ages 30 and over, more men married. This pattern, which has been recorded since 1997, reflects that on average, men tend to form relationships with women younger than themselves.

Among same sex couples, more women than men married at ages under 50; at ages 50 and over, more men married. In 2013, prior to the introduction of marriages for same sex couples, more women than men entered a civil partnership at ages under 40 while at ages 40 and over, more men formed a civil partnership.

For marriages of opposite sex couples, the average (mean) age for men marrying in 2014 was 37.0 years, while for women it was 34.6 years. This represents a slight increase compared with 2013 (36.7 years for men and 34.3 years for women) and continues the overall rise recorded since the 1970s. The average age at marriage for same sex couples in 2014 was slightly higher at 39.5 years for men and 36.9 years for women.

**Figure 3: Average age at marriage for men and women, 1974 to 2014**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The first marriages of same sex couples took place in England and Wales on 29 March 2014.
2. The average age has been calculated by excluding a very small number of records where the age of the party was not stated; our datasets report the number of records where the age has not been stated.

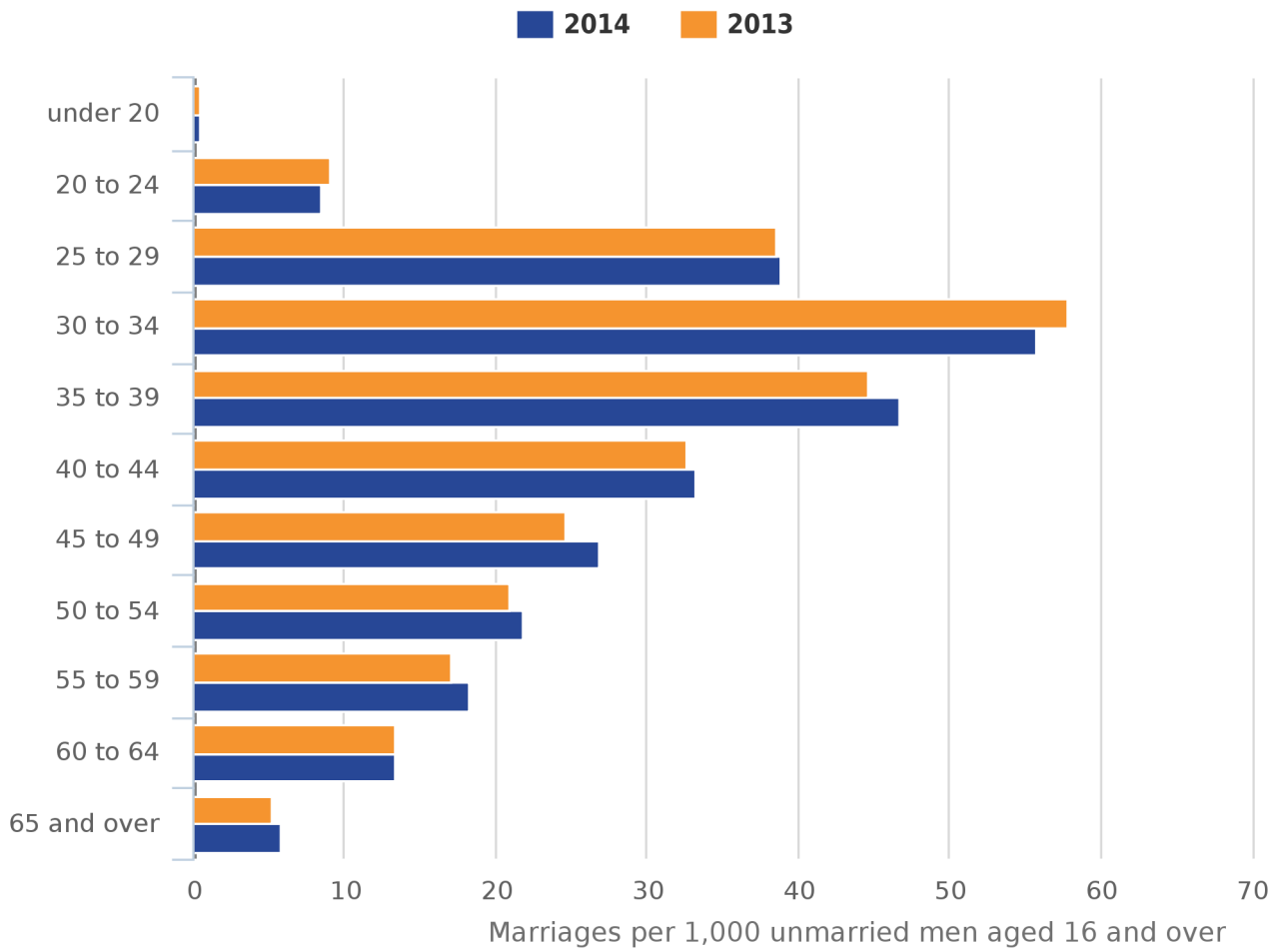
## 9 . Marriage rates for opposite sex couples increase for those aged 35 and over

Marriage rates provide a better indication of trends than simply looking at the number of marriages; this is because they take account of the size of the unmarried population, which will affect the number of marriages.

Marriage rates for opposite sex couples marrying in 2014 increased for both men and women aged 35 and over, compared with 2013. At ages under 35, marriage rates for men and women decreased, with the exception of those aged 25 to 29 where rates increased by less than 1% (Figures 4 and 5). The greatest percentage increase in rates occurred among men and women aged 65 and over (12% and 17% respectively) while the greatest decrease was among men and women aged under 20 (20% and 11% respectively).

**Figure 4: Marriages of opposite sex couples: marriages rates for men, by age group, 2013 and 2014**

England and Wales

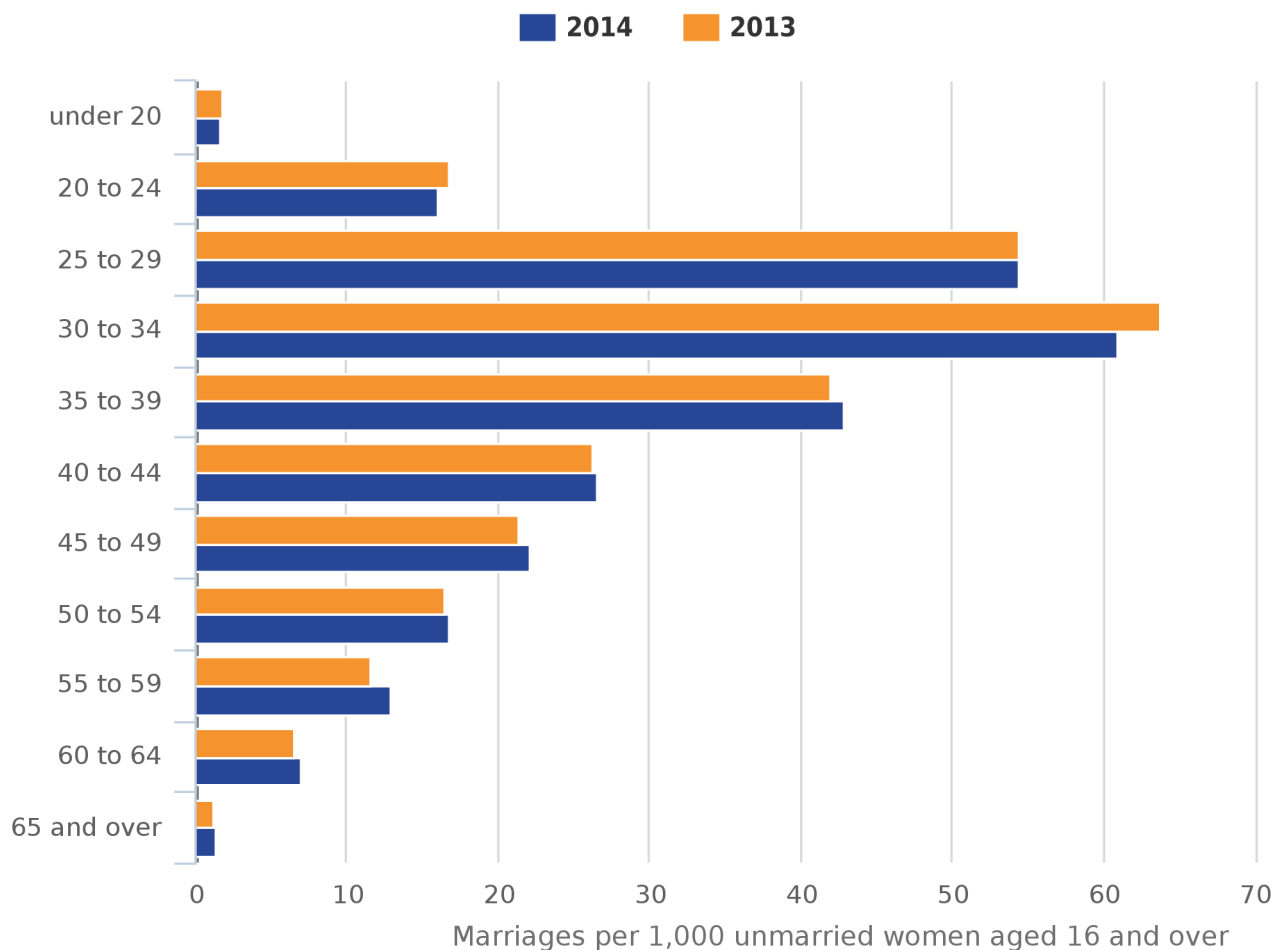


Source: Office for National Statistics



**Figure 5: Marriages of opposite sex couples: marriage rates for women, by age group, 2013 and 2014**

England and Wales



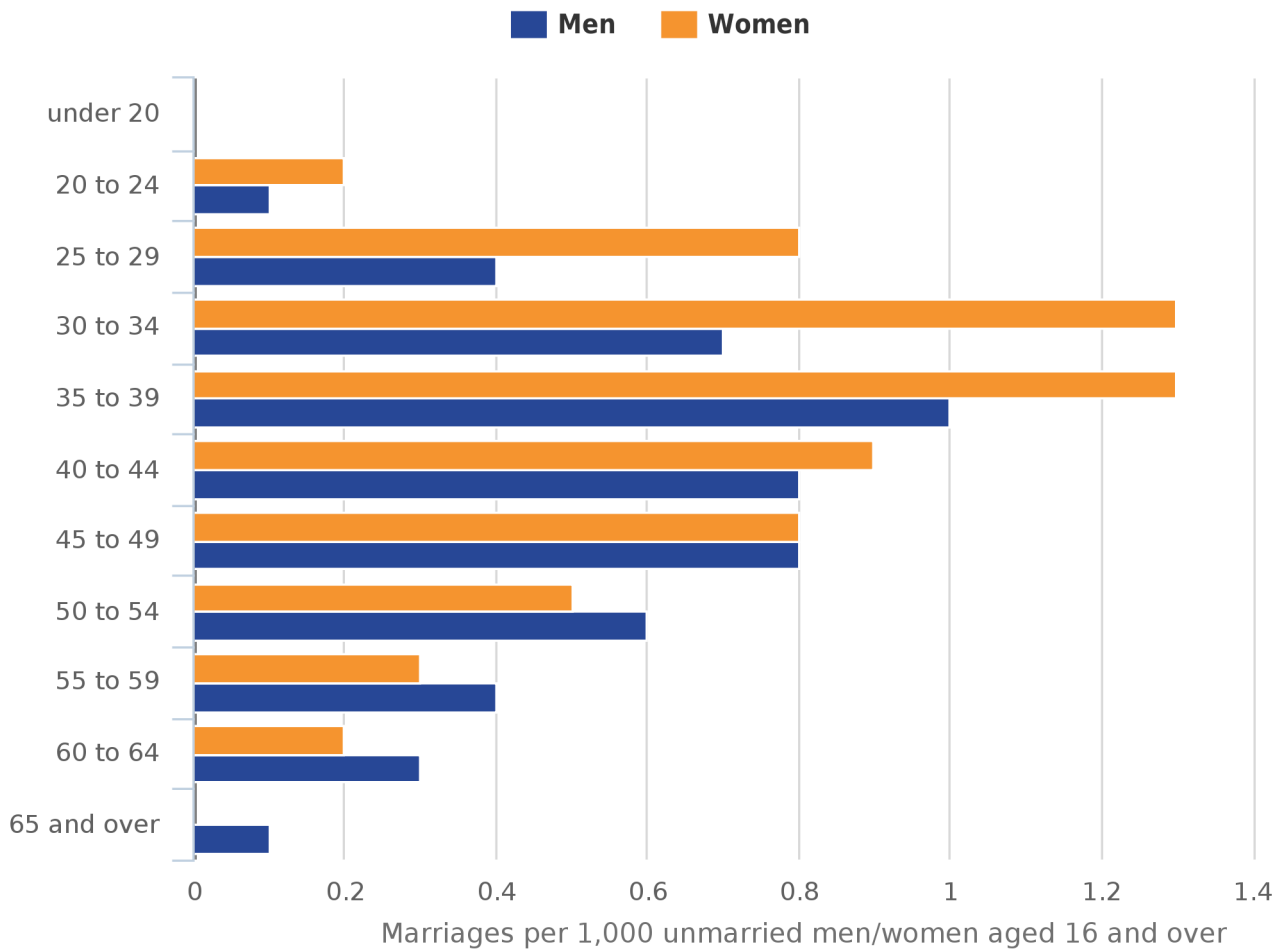
Source: Office for National Statistics

Comparing rates for marriages of opposite sex couples in 2014 with 2009 (the most recent low prior to the decline in 2013), there has been a 56% increase in the marriage rate for women aged 65 and over; for men aged 65 and over, marriage rates increased by 41%. At all other ages, marriage rates have generally declined or fluctuated, with the exception of women aged 55 to 59 where rates increased by 25%. Men and women aged under 20 have recorded the largest percentage decrease in marriage rates since 2009 (33% for men and 27% for women).

This is the first year for which marriage rates are available for marriages of same sex couples. Figure 6 shows that marriage rates for same sex couples are higher among women than men at ages 20 to 44 years; at ages 50 and over rates are higher among men. For marriages of opposite sex couples, a similar pattern exists, however, rates for women are higher at ages under 35 while at older ages rates are higher among men.

**Figure 6: Marriages of same sex couples: marriages rates for men and women, by age group, 2014**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The first marriages of same sex couples took place in England and Wales on 29 March 2014.
2. The population denominator used to calculate these rates is the unmarried population aged 16 and over. Marital status estimates are not available by sexual identity.

## 10 . Slightly more males than females converted their civil partnership into a marriage

Following implementation of the [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#), 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. In the last 3 weeks of 2014, there were 2,411 couples who converted their existing civil partnership into a marriage. Of these conversions, 52% were between male couples while 48% were between female couples.

[Provisional figures on conversions recorded between December 2014 and June 2015](#) were published in October 2015.

## 11 . Links to related statistics

For more detailed marriage statistics see our datasets, which provide a long time series, or our [explorable datasets](#), which provide detailed marriage statistics for 2001 to 2014.

The number of marriages and the marriage rate for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#).

[Provisional figures on marriages of same sex couples and the number of couples converting their civil partnership into a marriage](#) were published in October 2015.

[What percentage of marriages end in divorce?](#) shows that the estimated percentage of marriages ending in divorce (assuming 2010 divorce and mortality rates throughout the duration of marriage) is 42%. Around half of these divorces are expected to occur in the first 10 years of marriage.

Further statistics on [divorces](#), [civil partnerships and civil partnership dissolutions](#), [families and households](#), and [population estimates by marital status](#) are available on our website.

Special extracts and tabulations of marriage data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [ONS charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch ([vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone: +44 (0)1329 444110). User requested data will be published onto [our website](#).

## 12 . What's changed in this release?

Following the introduction of marriages of same sex couples on 29 March 2014, this publication now provides statistics on both marriages of opposite sex couples and marriages of same sex couples. Summary tables include main figures and provide a long time series for comparison where possible. [Explorable datasets](#) can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for marriages of both opposite sex and same sex couples.

Responses to our consultation on [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics for England and Wales](#) which ran from 8 October to 17 December 2013, were used to help determine the content of this release. A [document summarising these changes](#) and responses to our consultation was published in April 2014.

## 13 . Quality and methodology

1. This is the first time that final marriage statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2014. The release provides final annual data.
2. It is currently only possible to publish final annual marriage statistics around 26 months after the end of the reference year. This is due to delays in the submission of marriage entries by the clergy and authorised persons. Figures 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, has been less than a 0.4% since 2002. Although this means some marriages are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise which must be taken in order to publish as timely data as possible. We hope to improve the timeliness of marriage statistics in future years. We continue to work with the General Register Office, monitoring the receipt of marriage registrations and sending out reminders where delays are identified.
3. 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.
4. The [Marriages Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:
  - the strengths and limitations of the data
  - the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data and how it compares with related data
  - uses and users
  - how the output was created
5. Our [User Guide to Marriage Statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages and includes a glossary of terms.
6. Marriage statistics are comparable between countries within the UK; more information on comparability is contained in [Marriages Quality and Methodology Information](#).
7. The [Revisions policy for population statistics \(including marriage statistics\)](#) is available on our website.
8. The mean (average) ages presented in this release have not been standardised for age, and therefore do not take account of the changing structure of the population by age, sex and marital status.