

# Civil Partnerships in the UK, 2013



Coverage: **UK**

Date: **11 February 2015**

Geographical Area: **Local Authority and County**

Theme: **Population**

## Key Findings

- The number of civil partnerships formed in the UK in 2013 was 6,276, a decrease of 11% since 2012.
- The mean age of men forming a civil partnership in the UK in 2013 was 40.6 years, while for women it was 37.8 years. These figures represent a small increase in mean ages when compared to 2012.
- The number of civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2013 was 974, an increase of 20% since 2012.

## Background

This bulletin presents annual statistics on civil partnership formations in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2013. Statistics on civil partnership dissolutions in Northern Ireland, England and Wales in 2013 are also reported. Dissolution statistics for Scotland and the UK are not currently available for 2013 (see background note 2).

Civil partnerships are a legal recognition of a relationship between two people of the same sex (see background note 1). A dissolution is a legal end to a civil partnership obtained through the courts.

Civil partnership statistics are analysed by sex, age, previous marital status and area of occurrence. All figures are final.

The civil partnership formation statistics are derived from information recorded when civil partnerships are registered as part of civil registration, as required by law. Civil partnership dissolution statistics have been compiled from court records and include annulments.

This is the first time that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published annual 2013 civil partnership statistics for the UK and England and Wales.

The publication of Civil Partnerships in the UK, 2013, is later than originally planned. Changes in data collection methodology for civil partnership dissolutions data (see background note 3), required more time to be spent on quality assurance, in particular ensuring completeness of the dissolutions dataset. Depending upon the findings from the [Civil Partnership Consultation](#) published alongside this release, ONS plan to publish Civil Partnership Statistics for 2014 between July and October 2015.

## Number of Civil Partnership Formations

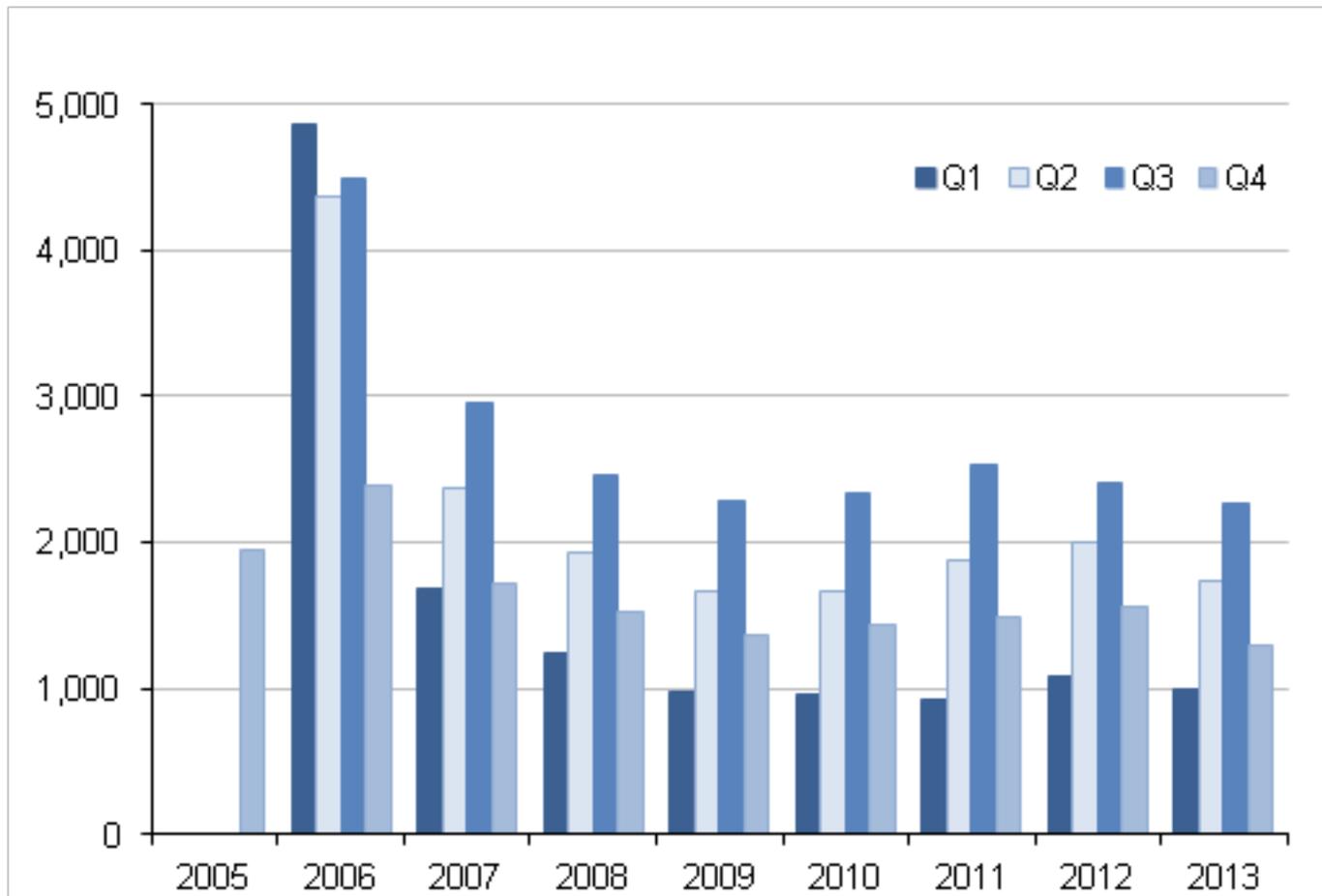
In 2013, the number of civil partnerships formed in the UK by same sex couples decreased by 11% to 6,276, from 7,037 in 2012. Since the Civil Partnership Act came into force in December 2005, the total number of civil partnerships formed in the UK, up to the end of 2013, is 66,730.

There were more people in civil partnerships by 2010 than originally estimated in the regulatory impact assessment on the Civil Partnership Act 2004. The impact assessment suggested that by 2010 the estimated likely take-up of civil partnerships in Great Britain would be between 11,000 and 22,000 people in civil partnerships ([Government Equalities Office](#), 2004). At the start of 2010, there were over 79,000 people in civil partnerships in Great Britain.

The number of civil partnership formations decreased in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2013, with a decrease of 12% in England (5,381 partnerships), 7.7% in Scotland (530 partnerships), and a slight decrease of 1.0% in Northern Ireland (100 partnerships). The number of civil partnership formations in Wales increased by 2.3% (265 partnerships) in 2013.

**Figure 1: Number of Civil Partnership Formations by Quarter, 2005-2013**

United Kingdom



Source: Office for National Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, National Records of Scotland

**Notes:**

1. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005

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The number of civil partnerships in the UK peaked in the first quarter of 2006 at 4,869 (Figure 1). The high numbers for 2006 are likely to be a result of many same sex couples in long-standing relationships taking advantage of the opportunity to formalise their relationship as soon as the legislation was implemented. The number of civil partnerships has since fallen to an average of 1,569 per quarter in 2013. This trend is similar to that found in Norway and Sweden where there was a particularly high level of formations immediately after legislation was introduced, followed by a few years of stable numbers at a lower level ([Andersson et al., 2006](#)).

The decrease in the number of civil partnership formations in England in 2013 may be due to the fact that the [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) came into effect on 29 March 2014. Some

couples may have delayed entering into a civil partnership if their preference was to get married rather than form a civil partnership.

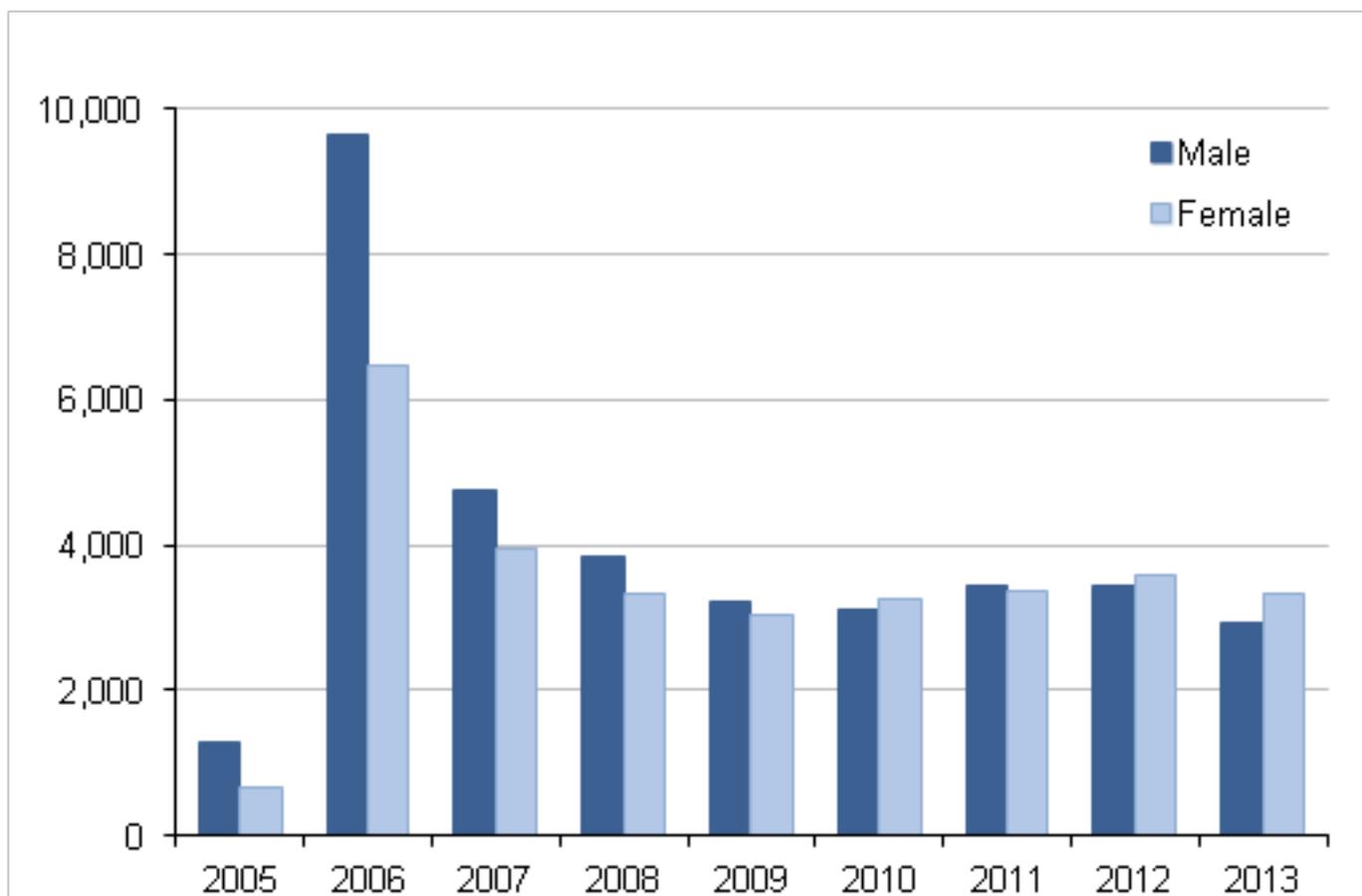
## Civil Partnerships by Sex

In 2013, there were more female civil partnership formations (53%) in the UK than male, which is similar to 2012 when 51% of civil partnerships were to female couples. Initially the numbers of males forming civil partnerships were much higher than females, but the numbers of male and female civil partnerships converged in 2009/10 (Figure 2). This is similar to trends recorded in other European countries where the majority of early same sex partnerships were formed by male couples with figures for males and females converging a few years after ([Andersson et al., 2006](#)).

In 2013, there were more female civil partnerships than male in all of the UK constituent countries, with 52% in England, 65% in Wales, 59% in Scotland and 54% in Northern Ireland being female.

**Figure 2: Civil Partnership Formations by Sex, 2005-2013**

United Kingdom



Source: Office for National Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, National Records of Scotland

### Notes:

1. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005

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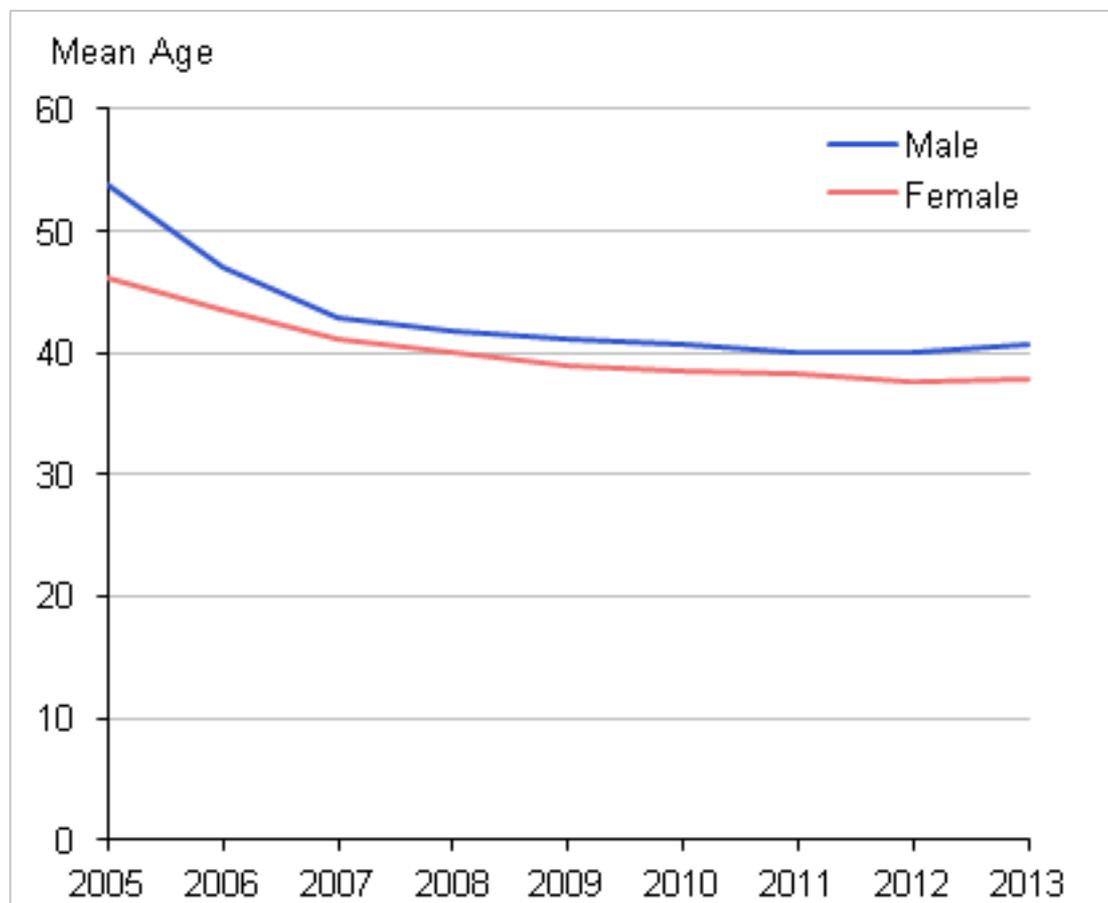
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**Civil Partnerships by Age**

The mean age at formation of civil partnership in the UK rose slightly from 40.0 years in 2012 to 40.6 in 2013 for men, and from 37.6 years in 2012 to 37.8 in 2013 for women (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Mean Age at Civil Partnership Formation by Sex, 2005-2013**

United Kingdom



Source: Office for National Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, National Records of Scotland

**Notes:**

1. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005

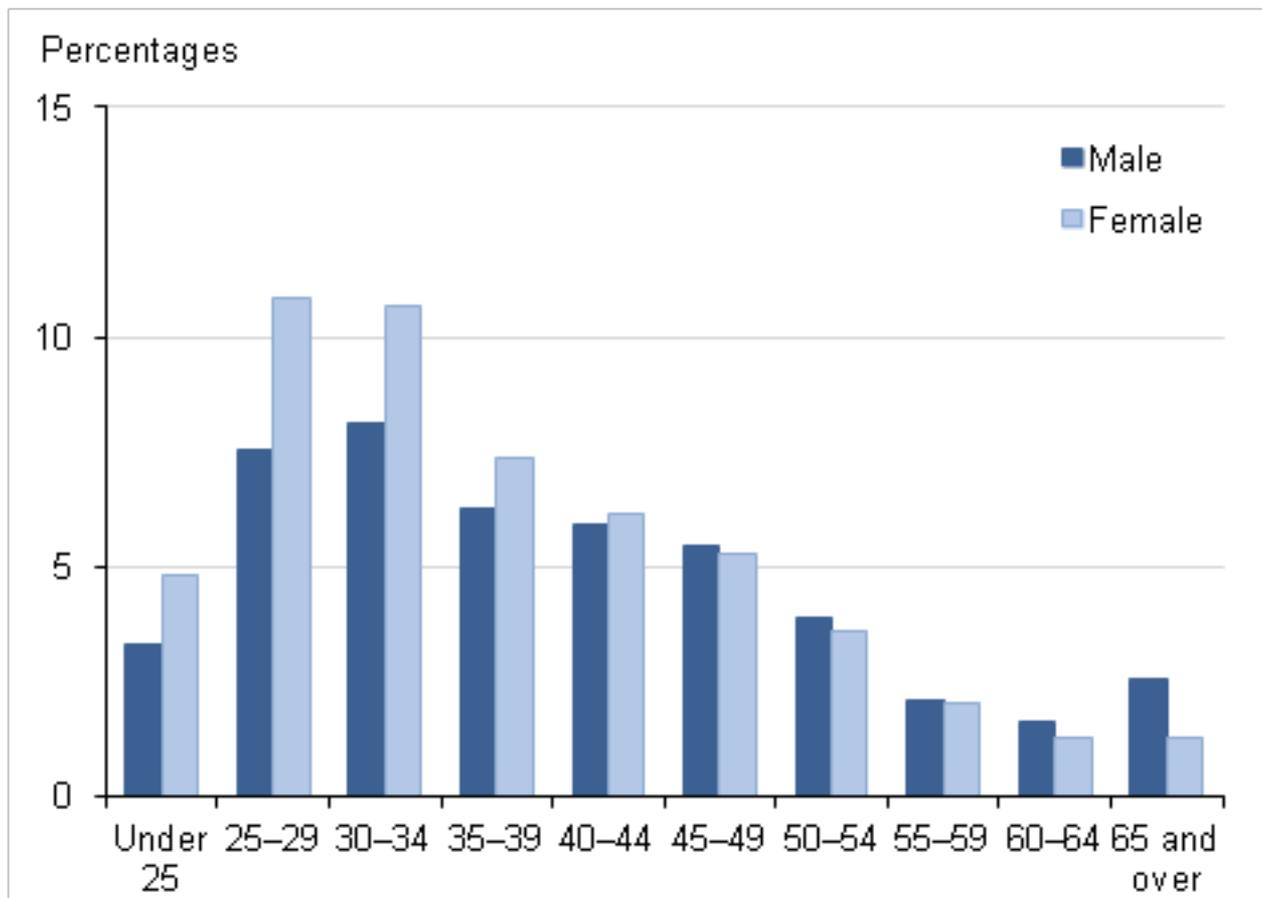
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The mean age at civil partnership formation for all partners in 2013 was highest in England (39.3 years) and lowest in Northern Ireland (35.3 years). The mean age in Wales was 38.5 years, while in Scotland it was 38.0 years. The mean age at formation of female civil partnerships was highest in England (38.0 years) and lowest in Northern Ireland (35.0 years), while the mean age at formation of male civil partnerships was highest in Wales (42.1 years) and lowest in Northern Ireland (35.6 years).

**Figure 4: Percentage of Civil Partnership Formations by Age Group and Sex, 2013**

United Kingdom



Source: Office for National Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, National Records of Scotland

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Figure 4 shows that in 2013, there were more female civil partners in the lower age groups than males (under 45) and more male civil partners in the higher age groups than females (45 and over). This reflects the higher average age at formation of civil partnerships for men than women. The highest proportions of civil partners were those aged 25-29 for females and 30-34 for males. In 2012, the most common age groups for both men and women to form a civil partnership was 30-34.

## Civil Partnerships by Area of Formation in England and Wales

London has been the most popular region in England and Wales to register a civil partnership every year since the legislation was introduced in 2005. In 2013, 26% of all civil partnerships in England and Wales were registered there (1,495 civil partnerships).

The local authorities with the largest number of civil partnership registrations in 2013 were Brighton and Hove unitary authority (78 male and 104 female partnerships) and the London borough of Westminster (133 male and 46 female partnerships).

The distribution of civil partnership formations across England and Wales by county, unitary authority, metropolitan district and London borough is not evenly spread. A couple may choose to register their civil partnership in any register office or approved location across the UK. Data by area represent the area in which the partnership was registered and are not necessarily a good indicator of the area of usual residence.

## Civil Partnerships by Previous Partnership Status

In 2013, the majority (74%) of civil partnerships formed in the UK were to couples where both partners were single (have never previously entered into a marriage or civil partnership). However, 10% of men and 19% of women forming a civil partnership in the UK had been in a previous marriage or civil partnership. These were similar to the proportions for 2012.

The proportion of those forming a civil partnership who had been in a previous marriage or civil partnership in 2013, was highest in Wales (16%) and lowest in Northern Ireland (12%). The proportion in Scotland and England was 15%.

In 2013, there were 316 people forming a civil partnership in the UK who had been in a previous civil partnership which had ended by dissolution or death.

## Number of Dissolutions

To obtain a civil partnership dissolution in the UK, a couple must have been in either a registered civil partnership or a same sex partnership recognised abroad for at least 12 months.

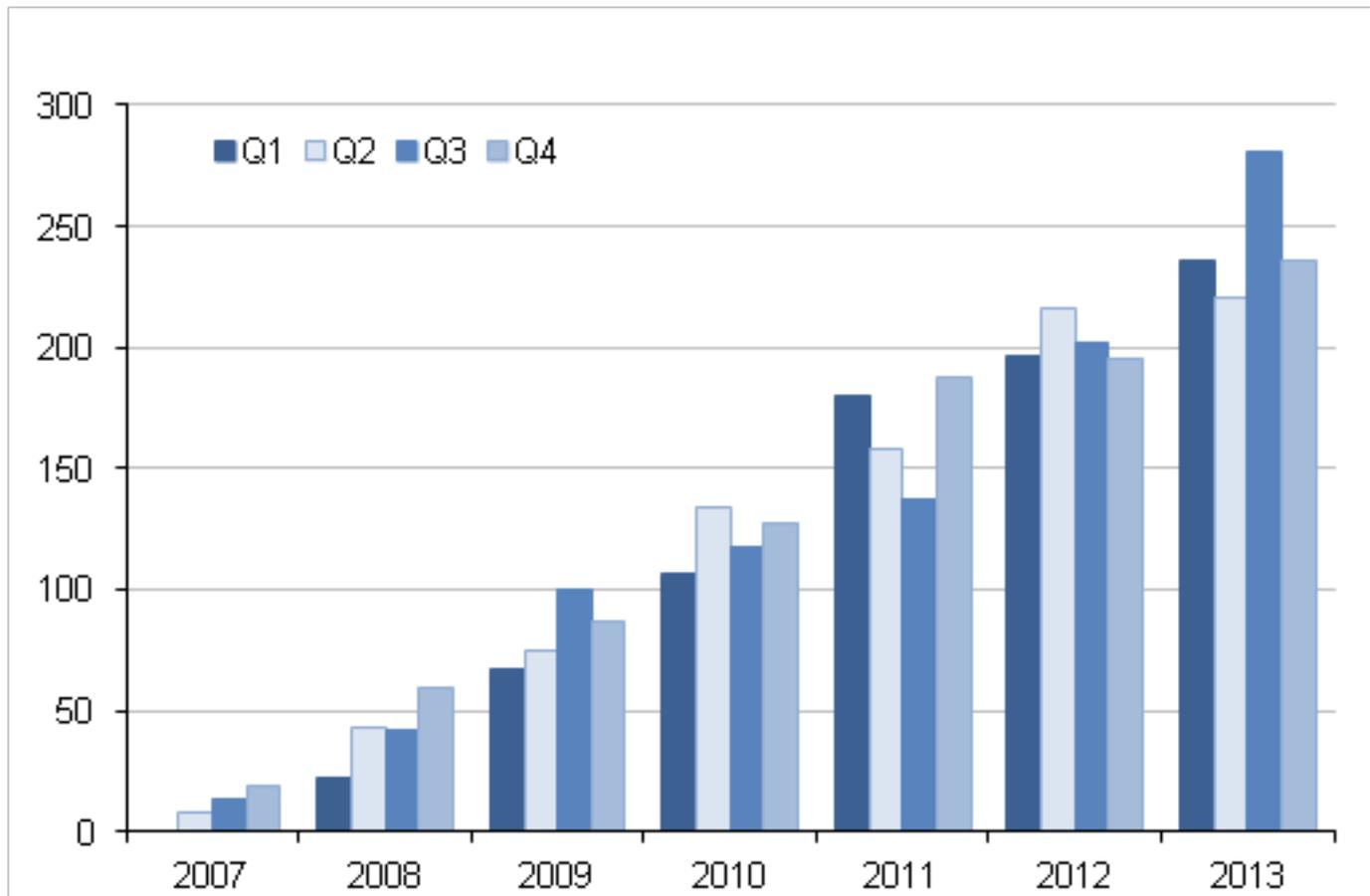
The number of civil partnership dissolutions in the UK in 2013 is not currently available as 2013 dissolution figures for Scotland are not yet available (see background note 2).

There were 974 civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales in 2013, compared with 809 in 2012 (a 20% increase). There were 10 civil partnership dissolutions in Northern Ireland in 2013. The rising number of dissolutions is in part a consequence of the increasing number of civil partners living in the UK.

By the end of 2013, 4.5% of male civil partnerships in England and Wales had ended in dissolution, while 8.4% of all female partnerships in England and Wales had ended in dissolution (see background note 8).

**Figure 5: Number of Civil Partnership Dissolutions by Quarter, 2007-2013**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

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**Dissolutions by Age, Sex, and Previous Partnership Status**

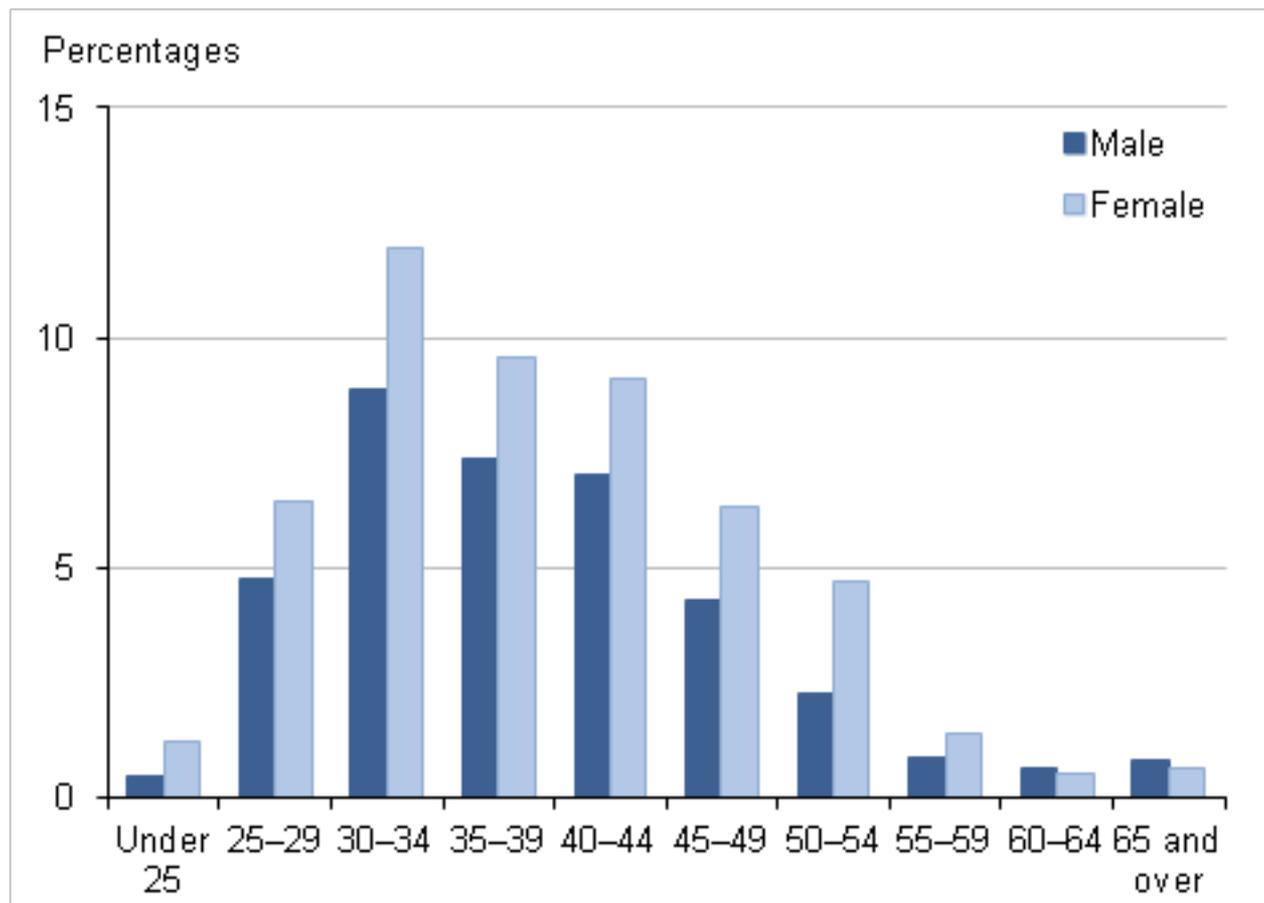
Of the 974 dissolutions in England and Wales in 2013, 59% were to female couples (576 dissolutions) while the remaining 41% were to male couples (398 dissolutions). There were also more women dissolving civil partnerships than men in Northern Ireland. Higher numbers of dissolutions among female than male partnerships are also seen in other countries with same sex partnership laws, such as Norway and Sweden ([Andersson et al., 2006](#)).

The mean age at dissolution of civil partnership in England and Wales in 2013 was 39.5 years for men (an increase from 38.9 years in 2012) and 39.3 for women (an increase from 38.7 years in 2012).

The average age of all partners dissolving a civil partnership in 2013 was higher in Northern Ireland (42.3 years) than in England and Wales (39.4 years).

**Figure 6: Percentage of Civil Partnership Dissolutions by Age Group and Sex, 2013**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Percentages do not sum to 100 as a small number of records have age not stated.

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In 2013, more females than males dissolved their civil partnership at ages under 60 while more males dissolved their civil partnership at ages 60 and over (Figure 6). This reflects the higher age at formation of civil partnerships for men than women.

The majority (82%) of civil partnership dissolutions in England and Wales in 2013 were to partners whose previous partnership status had always been single. However, 9.7% of men and 15% of women dissolving a civil partnership in England and Wales had been in a previous marriage or civil partnership, these have decreased from 10% and 17% in 2012 respectively.

## User Requirement for Marriages, Divorce and Civil Partnership Statistics Given the Introduction of Marriage of Same Sex Couples

The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) makes provision for the marriage of same sex couples in England and Wales, either in a civil ceremony (in a register office or approved premise, for example a hotel) or on religious premises (provided that the religious organisation concerned is in agreement with the marriage being solemnised through a religious ceremony).

ONS ran a public consultation on [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics for England and Wales](#) from 8 October 2013 to 17 December 2013. In response to this consultation, ONS intends to change the way in which marriages, divorces and civil partnerships data are published from 2015 onwards. ONS plans to publish a selection of summary tables for each topic; these summary tables will provide a significant time series for comparison. Alongside these summary tables, ONS plans to publish explorable datasets and anonymised microdata, both of which can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for a particular calendar year. A [document](#) summarising responses to the consultation and future plans is published on the ONS website.

## What is the Future of Civil Partnerships?

The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) enabled same sex couples in England and Wales to obtain legal recognition of their relationship by registering as civil partners of each other. The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) enabled same sex couples in England and Wales to marry from 29 March 2014. It also has a number of related provisions, including for those in a civil partnership to convert that relationship to a marriage if they choose to do so and provisions that will enable a person to change their legal gender without ending their existing marriage. These other provisions came into force on 10 December 2014. The Act does not remove the availability of civil partnerships for same sex couples.

The Government Equalities Office carried out a review of the future of civil partnerships in England and Wales including a full [public consultation](#) which ran between 23 January and 17 April 2014. They received over 10,000 responses to the consultation.

Several important organisations thought it was too soon to consider making changes to civil partnership legislation - this should wait until the impact of extending marriage to same sex couples is known. Other organisations, in contrast, put forward a case for opening up civil partnerships to opposite sex couples, for example because civil partnership and marriage were different relationships and all couples should have equal access to both.

Given the lack of consensus on the way forward, the Government will not be making any changes to the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#).

## Proposed Changes to Annual Civil Partnership Statistics

Currently, ONS produces figures for England and Wales and compiles UK figures using data from all constituent countries. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are provided by [National Records of Scotland](#) (NRS), [Scottish Government](#) and [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

(NISRA). Each organisation publishes civil partnership statistics at different times throughout the year, sometimes with a first release of provisional figures which are finalised in a later publication.

Several factors impact on the timing of the annual UK civil partnership statistics release, resulting in published figures being a mix of provisional and final data. To ensure a more timely publication of final figures, ONS is proposing to change the coverage of the annual release of civil partnership statistics to provide figures for England and Wales only. Figures for the UK, Scotland and Northern Ireland would not be included within the release. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland would continue to be published by [NRS](#) (formations), [Scottish Government](#) (dissolutions), and [NISRA](#). Summary figures for the UK and constituent countries would continue to be published annually in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#). A [consultation document](#) is available on the ONS website. The consultation is running until 29 March 2015.

## Users of Civil Partnership Statistics

Key users of civil partnership statistics include the Government Equalities Office (GEO). GEO takes the lead on all civil partnership matters and uses Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for answering any policy-based questions they receive.

Organisations covering gay and lesbian rights and equality issues, for example, Stonewall, use ONS civil partnership statistics to support their campaigns and pass on the data to their own users. Businesses such as civil partnership celebration planners use the data published by area as a prediction of the amount of business they might expect.

## Further Information

More data on [Civil Partnerships in the UK](#) in 2013 are available on the ONS website.

A [Quality and Methodology Information document \(111.6 Kb Pdf\)](#) for civil partnership statistics is available on the ONS website.

Annual civil partnership figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#).

[National Records of Scotland](#) provides civil partnership formation statistics for Scotland.

[Scottish Government](#) provides civil partnership dissolution statistics in Civil Law Statistics.

[Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) provides civil partnership statistics for Northern Ireland.

Further statistics on [Marriages](#) and [Divorces](#), are available on the ONS website. There is also data on [Families and Households](#), including figures on same sex cohabiting couples.

[2011 Census](#) data provides information on where civil partners were living in England and Wales.

[Population Estimates by Marital Status](#) provide the estimated resident population by single year of age, sex and marital status (single, married, divorced, and widowed) for England and Wales. Figures are currently available up to 2010.

ONS has [consulted](#) on the future of [population estimates by marital status](#) and living arrangements. Estimates of the population by marital status (including civil partnerships) by age group and sex for 2002 to 2014 will be published in Summer 2015. These will use survey estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), constrained to the national mid-year population estimates. Published rates for 2011 and 2012 will be updated once the new estimates are available. It is planned that civil partnership formation rates will be revised back to 2005 once the new estimates are available.

An article examining [civil partnerships in England and Wales five years on](#) from its introduction was published in the September 2011 edition of Population Trends. This article examines civil partnerships and dissolutions between 2005 and 2010, and compares these figures to marriage and divorce figures over the same period. The article has an accompanying [video podcast](#), using audio commentary and graphical animations to cover the key trends.

## References

Andersson, G, Noack, T, Seierstad, A and Weedon-Fekjaer H (2006) ['The demographics of same sex marriages in Norway and Sweden'](#), Demography 43: 79-98

Government Equalities Office, (2004) [Final Regulatory Assessment: Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), [webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file23829.pdf](http://www.webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file23829.pdf)

## Background notes

1. The [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#) came into force on 5 December 2005 in the UK, the first day couples could give notice of their intention to form a civil partnership. The Act enables same sex couples aged 16 and over to obtain legal recognition of their relationship. The first day that couples could normally form a partnership was 19 December 2005 in Northern Ireland, 20 December 2005 in Scotland and 21 December 2005 in England and Wales.
2. Scottish Government took over sole responsibility for the publication of statistics on civil partnership dissolutions in Scotland at the end of 2012. Civil partnership dissolutions in Scotland for the year ending March 2014 will be published in Civil Law Statistics in Scotland in Spring 2015; statistics for 2013 calendar year are not available until this time. Consequently, it is not possible to provide 2013 civil partnership dissolution statistics for Scotland or the UK at this time.
3. Prior to the 2013 data year, civil partnership dissolution statistics for England and Wales were derived from data provided on the D106 civil partnership dissolution form, sent to ONS by the courts. From the 2013 data year onwards, civil partnership dissolution data have been extracted from HM Courts and Tribunals Service's FamilyMan case management system and sent electronically to ONS.

4. The figures relate only to civil partnerships taking place in the constituent countries of the UK. They do not include civil partnerships of UK residents taking place abroad but will include non-UK residents who form a partnership in the UK.
5. Figures for civil partnership formations in England and Wales are based on date of formation. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are based on date of registration. The impact of this difference is negligible.
6. Data on civil partnership formations are based on area of formation and not area of residence.
7. Data on civil partnership dissolutions are based on country of dissolution and not country of residence.
8. The figures on the percentage of civil partnerships ending in dissolution are derived from the numbers of civil partnerships and dissolutions taking place in England and Wales since the Civil Partnership Act came into force in December 2005. This does not take into account the fact that some civil partnerships which took place in the UK may be dissolved in another country or that some dissolutions may take place in the UK for a civil partnership which was formed in another country.
9. Civil partnership rates are published for England and Wales (combined) only. The civil partnership rate is the number of people forming a civil partnership per 1,000 unmarried population aged 16 and over (unmarried means single, widowed or divorced). Civil partnership status is not included in the population estimates by marital status hence the unmarried population provides the most appropriate denominator for rates. Further information on population estimates can be found on the ONS website. Marital status estimates are not produced for the United Kingdom or Northern Ireland hence the corresponding civil partnership rates are not available. The latest population estimates by marital status available for Scotland are for 2008, therefore no rates after 2008 have been calculated. The production of population estimates by marital status for 2009 and future years have been postponed and demand is currently being reviewed by National Records of Scotland through a user consultation.
10. Marital status estimates for 2013 are not currently available. ONS has consulted on the future of population estimates by marital status and living arrangements. Estimates of the population by marital status (including civil partnerships) by age group and sex in England and Wales for 2002 to 2014 will be published in Summer 2015. These will use survey estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), constrained to the national mid-year population estimates.

Civil partnership rates for 2011 and 2012 are based on estimated 2011 marital status population estimates. These use the mid-2011 population estimates based on the 2011 Census and the marital status distribution from the 2008-based marital status population projections for 2011. Analyses comparing the marital status distribution in the marital status estimates for mid-2008 to mid-2010 and the 2008 based marital status projections for 2008-2012 have shown that these estimates provide:

- a plausible marital status distribution for 2011 and 2012; and
- a more plausible marital status distribution than the 2010 marital status estimates.

Published rates for 2011 and 2012 will be updated once the new estimates are available. It is planned that civil partnership formation rates will be revised back to 2005 once the new estimates are available.

11. The mean ages presented in this release have not been standardised for age and therefore do not take account of the changing structure of the male/female population by age and marital status.
12. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
13. A list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the statistics and written commentary is available in [Pre-release Access List – Civil Partnerships 2013](#). The rules and principles which govern pre-release access are featured within the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008](#).
14. Special extracts and tabulations of civil partnership data are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreement of costs, where appropriate). Such enquiries should be made to:

Vital Statistics Output Branch

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Segensworth Road

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Fareham

Hampshire PO15 5RR

Tel: +44 (0)1329 444110

E-mail: [vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

The [ONS charging policy](#) is available on the ONS website. In line with the [ONS approach to open data](#), ad hoc data requests will be published onto [the website](#).

15. We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback to the postal or email address above.
16. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

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