

Statistical bulletin

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2017

Population by legal marital status and cohabitation status by age and sex for England and Wales.



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1 . Main points

- The proportion of the population of England and Wales aged 16 years and over who were married in 2017 (51.0%) has remained broadly unchanged since 2010, but has reduced slightly since 2002 (54.8%).
- The single, never married population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales increased by 3.9 million from 2002 to 2017 whilst the number of married people only increased by 1.2 million over the same period.
- One in eight people aged 16 years and over in England and Wales in 2017 were cohabiting, continuing a steadily-increasing trend since 2002.
- The majority (61.4%) of the population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales were living in a couple in 2017.
- An increasing proportion of 50- to 64-year-olds in England and Wales in 2017 were single and never married (12.9%), nearly 30% of whom were living as a couple.

2 . Statistician's comment

"In England and Wales, just over half of the population aged 16 years and over were married in 2017, so marriage was still the most common marital status. The percentage of the population in a same-sex marriage continued to rise (0.12%) but at a slower rate than seen between 2015 and 2016 immediately after the introduction of same-sex marriage. Cohabitation continues to grow in popularity; approximately 1 in 10 people were living in a couple having never been married or civil partnered. A further 2.6% were cohabiting having previously been married or in a civil partnership."

Paula Guy, Population Statistics Division, Office for National Statistics.

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3 . Things you need to know about this release

This bulletin focuses on the population aged 16 years and over. All analyses and percentages presented exclude those aged under 16 years. Marital status estimates for those aged 0 to 15 years are included within the [datasets](#) accompanying this release. All those aged under 16 years are considered to be single in line with the legal age of marriage in England and Wales.

Estimates are available for [England and Wales](#) combined, and for [England](#) and [Wales](#) separately.

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements refer to the mid-year (30 June). The estimates are calculated by applying legal marital status and living arrangement distributions from the April to June quarter of the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#) to the [mid-year population estimates](#) for England and Wales.

Marital status indicates whether a person is legally married or not. This publication uses five categories of legal marital status:

- single, never married or civil partnered
- married, including separated (this category includes those in both opposite and same-sex marriages)
- civil partnered, including separated
- divorced, including legally-dissolved civil partners
- widowed, including surviving civil partners

Civil partnerships are a form of civil union granted under the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#). This allows same-sex couples to obtain the same rights and responsibilities as civil marriage. The Civil Partnership Act came into force on 5 December 2005.

Living arrangements indicate whether people are living with a partner or not, irrespective of their legal marital status.

This publication does not include estimates of couples who are living apart together (LAT). The [Quality and Methodology Information report](#) provides further detail.

4 . Over half the population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales are married

In 2017, just over half of the population (51.0%) aged 16 years and over in England and Wales were married. The second-largest proportion was the single population at 34.4%, followed by divorced at 7.8%, widowed at 6.6% and civil partnered at 0.2% (Table 1).

Similar trends were seen in England and Wales separately, where being married was the most common marital status (51.2% England; 50.6% Wales). In both countries, just over a third of the population aged 16 years and over were single and around 8% were divorced. A slightly higher proportion of people in Wales (7.8%) were widowed compared with England (6.3%) in 2017.

Table 1: Marital status (ages 16 years and over), 2017

	England and Wales				
	Single ¹	Married	Civil partnered	Divorced	Widowed
Total number	16,361,685	24,249,371	99,695	3,696,837	3,139,776
Percentage of population aged 16 years and over	34.4%	51.0%	0.2%	7.8%	6.6%

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. See the 'Things you need to know' section for details about each marital status category.

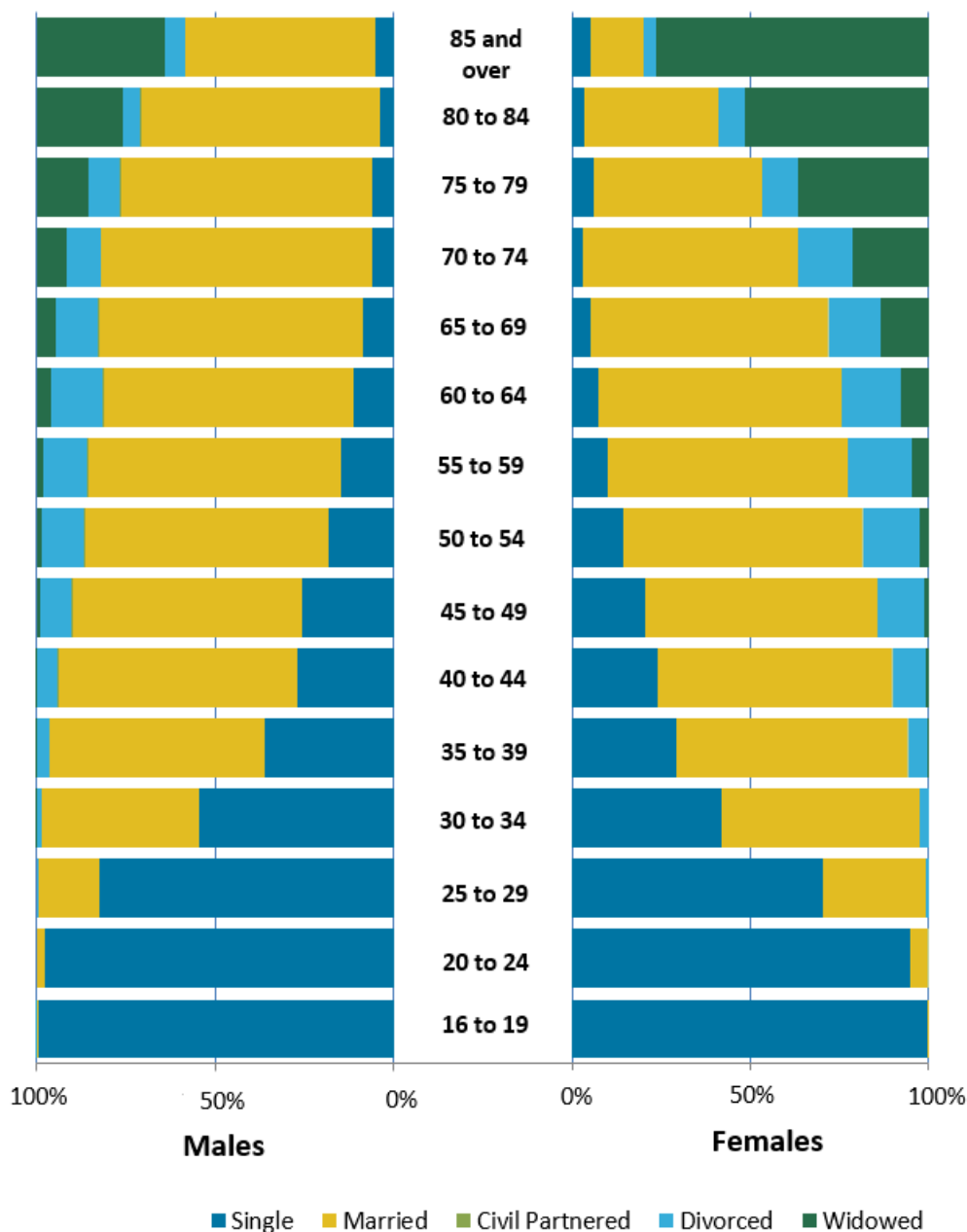
2017 saw a higher proportion of males (52.0%) who were married compared with females (50.0%) in England and Wales. Females were less likely to be single than males (31.1% compared with 37.8%), but more likely to be divorced or widowed. This may be a result of the life expectancy of women being higher than that of men.

These trends were also seen for both England and Wales separately, where a greater proportion of males were married or single than females.

The number of people in same-sex marriages accounted for 0.3% of the total married population of England and Wales. In 2017, the number of people aged 16 years and over in a same-sex marriage was 67,739. Males accounted for 56.8% (38,484) of the population in a marriage between same-sex couples and females the remaining 43.2% (29,255). This gap has closed marginally from 2016, where males accounted for 57.7% of same-sex marriages and females accounted for the remaining 42.3%.

Figure 1: Percentage of people (age 16 years and over) by marital status, age group and sex, 2017

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. See the “Things you need to know” section for details about each marital status category.

In 2017, being married was the most common marital status for women aged between 30 to 34 years and 75 to 79 years. Beyond 80 years, widowed became the most common status. For men, being married was the most common marital status after age 30 to 34 years up to the oldest ages. A marital status of single, never married was most common for those aged under 30 years for both sexes (Figure 1).

5 . Living in a couple continues to be the most popular living arrangement in England and Wales

In 2017, of the population aged 16 years and over, 61.4% were living as a couple ¹ in England and Wales; 48.8% lived as “married or civil partner couples”, 10.0% as “cohabiting, never married or civil partnered” and 2.6% “cohabiting, previously married or civil partnered”. The remaining 38.6% were not living as couples (Table 2). This included those living alone, living with friends or with other family members.

Table 2: Living arrangements (ages 16 years and over), 2017

	England and Wales				
	Living in a couple			Not living in a couple	
	Married or civil partnered	Cohabiting - never married or civil partnered	Cohabiting- previously married or civil partnered	Never married or civil partnered	Previously married or civil partnered ¹
Total number	23,218,094	4,739,645	1,242,776	11,610,305	6,736,544
Percentage of population aged 16 years and over	48.8%	10.0%	2.6%	24.4%	14.2%

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

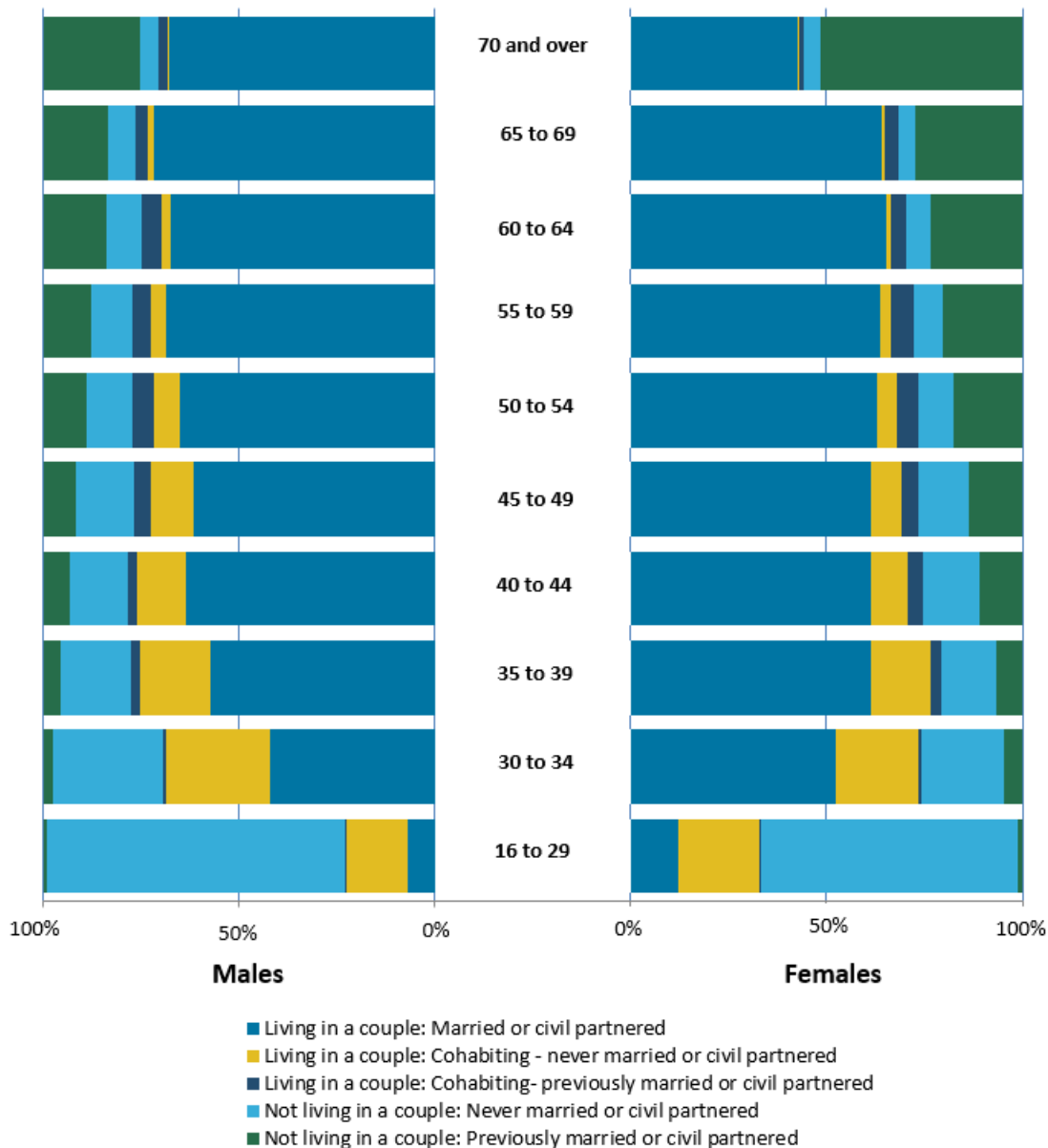
1. People who are married or civil partnered but whose partner is away from the household because they live away for work, are in prison or in a care home, will appear in this category.

In 2017, males in England and Wales were more likely to be living in a couple than females (63.0% compared with 59.9%). However, the proportion of females (18.5%) who were not living in a couple, having been previously married or civil partnered, was nearly double that of the proportion of males (9.6%). This reflects that [women may be outliving their partners](#), with a greater proportion of females (9.6%) being widowed in 2017 compared with males (3.4%).

These trends were similar for England and Wales separately also, where for both, living in a couple was the most common arrangement (England – 61.5%, Wales – 61.3%).

Figure 2: Percentage of people (age 16 years and over) by living arrangements, age group and sex, 2017

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. People who are married or civil partnered but whose partner is away from the household because they live away for work, are in prison or in a care home, will appear in the “Not living in a couple: Previously married or civil partnered” category.

In England and Wales in 2017, more than half (55.6%) of female 30- to 34-year-olds were married or civil partnered compared with 44.3% of males of the same age. A large proportion of this age group may have chosen instead to cohabit and this is reflected in the [average age of marriage](#). For age groups 30 to 34 years and over, living in a couple, married or civil partnered, was the most popular living arrangement for both sexes, except for females aged 70 years and over where not living in a couple, previously married or civil partnered, was the most common (Figure 2).

Notes for: Living in a couple continues to be the most popular living arrangement in England and Wales

1. “Living in a couple” includes people who live just with their partner and also people who live with their partner and others such as children, lodgers or other family members.

6 . An increasing proportion of 50- to 64-year-olds are “single, never married” and cohabitation for this group is becoming more common

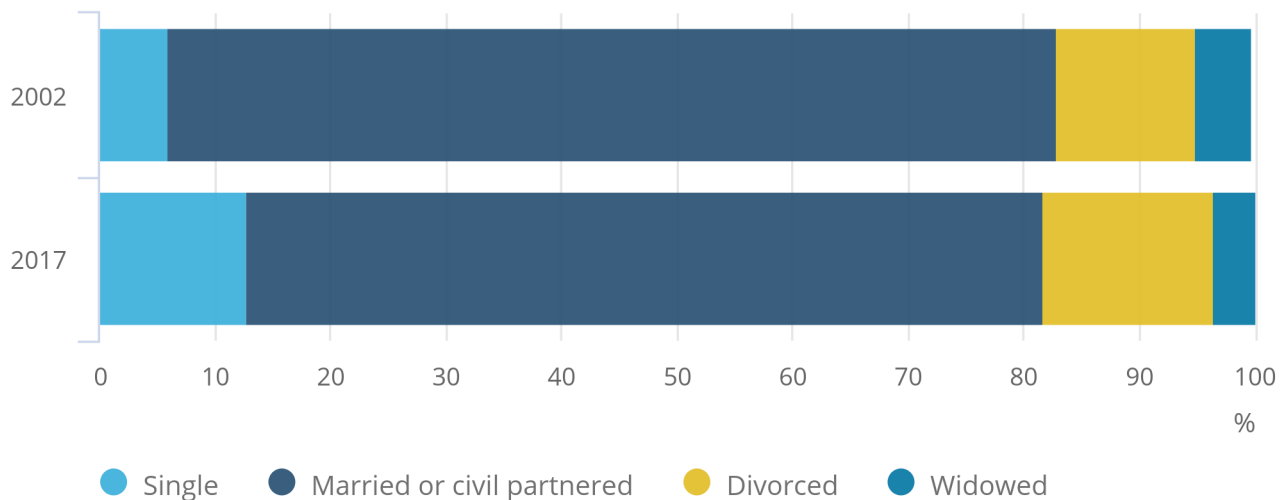
It is interesting to look at the marital status and living arrangements of those aged 50 to 64 years who will be reaching State Pension age over the next two decades. Marital status and living arrangements can have a bearing on demand for health and social care services (including the provision of informal care) and life expectancy.

Figure 3: Percentage of people aged 50 to 64 by marital status and by selected years

England and Wales

Figure 3: Percentage of people aged 50 to 64 by marital status and by selected years

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. See the “Things you need to know” section for details about each marital status category.
2. The married category includes Civil partnerships for 2017 only.

In 2017, an estimated 12.9% of the population in England and Wales aged between 50 and 64 years had a marital status of single, a steady increase from 6.1% in 2002. This percentage has increased at a similar rate for males and females. Being married remains the most prevalent status of this age group, however, the proportion that were married or in a civil partnership declined from 76.9% in 2002 to 68.8% in 2017 (Figure 3).

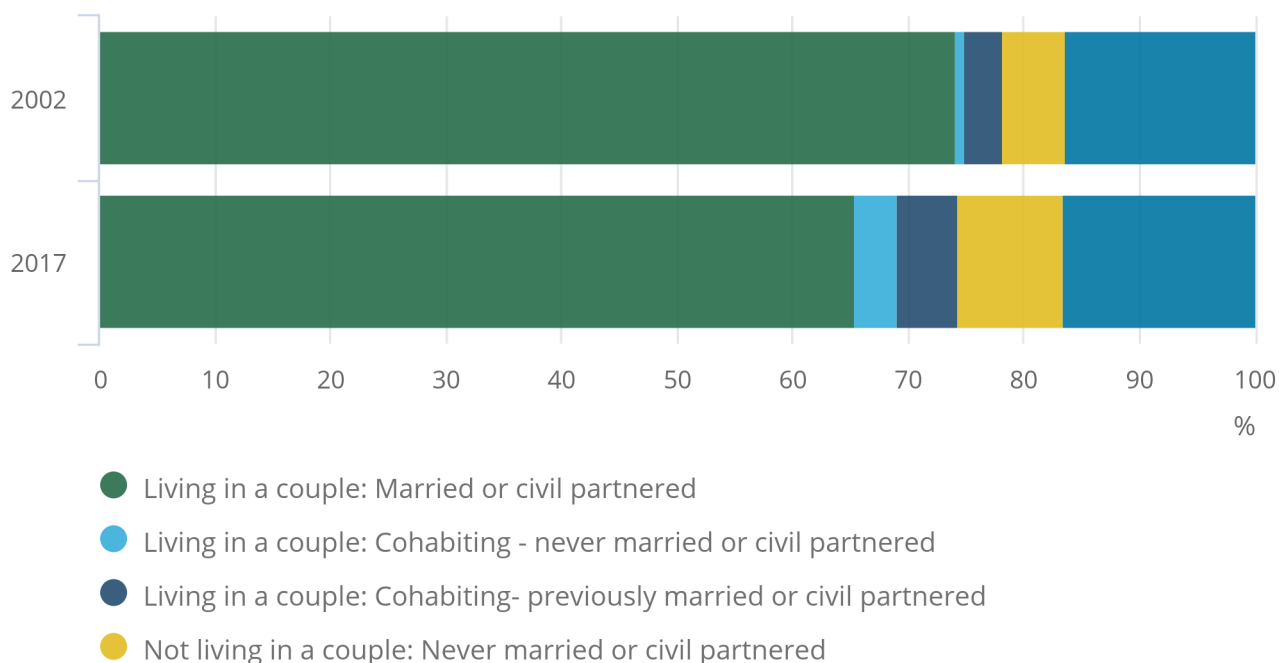
With regards to the living arrangements of this selected age group, the data reflects the patterns seen for marital status for the years 2002 and 2017 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage of people aged between 50 to 64 years by living arrangements and by selected years

England and Wales

Figure 4: Percentage of people aged between 50 to 64 years by living arrangements and by selected years

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Over this 15-year period, cohabitation of those between 50 and 64 years who have never married or been in a civil partnership is becoming more common (Figure 4), increasing from 0.7% in 2002 to 3.8% in 2017.

Of all people who were never married aged 50 to 64 years, nearly 30% of them cohabited in 2017 compared with just under 12% in 2002 (Figure 4).

Data for males and females show that patterns were similar for both sexes.

7 . Links to related statistics

For more detailed marital status estimates and living arrangements statistics see our [datasets](#), which provide a time series from 2002.

Further statistics on [marriages](#) including marriages between same-sex couples, [divorces](#) and [civil partnerships](#) are available.

8 . What has changed within this publication?

The estimates referring to the years 2013 to 2016 have been revised following the re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 2017. The changes to the estimates have been minimal with the largest change of 3.99% for males aged 75 to 79 years who were single in 2013.

In 2017, we published estimates and quality measures for England and for Wales separately for the first time. A time series is available back to 2002 for the two countries. Due to small sample sizes in the survey data, the age bands presented for England and for Wales separately are wider than those presented for England and Wales combined. The age bands have been designed so that data for England and Wales can be collapsed to provide equivalent estimates.

9 . Quality and methodology

We have previously published population estimates by marital status only for 1971 to 2010 using a different methodology. Following a consultation in 2014 the methodology was updated. The differences in the data produced by the two methodologies are explained within an earlier [bulletin](#) and within a [dataset](#) alongside the release.

The [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements Quality and Methodology Information](#) report 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

The [Quality and Methodology Information report \(QMI\)](#) and the [Details and results of the internal review leading to changes in the methodology of population estimates by marital status](#) report provide more detail on the new methodology.

These estimates are only available for England and Wales. National Records of Scotland (NRS) has published equivalent estimates for Scotland up to and including estimates for mid-2008, which are produced using similar methods to the old methodology used for England and Wales. However, following a user consultation, publication of Population estimates by marital status for Scotland was suspended and demand for these estimates is currently being reviewed by NRS. Further information can be found on the [NRS webpage for marital status population estimates](#).

Population estimates by marital status for Northern Ireland are not produced, as the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has not identified a current user requirement for such estimates.

The estimates presented within the [datasets](#) are provided with confidence intervals (around the survey component of the estimate) and also an indication of the size of the coefficient of variation (for the survey component of the estimate). These quality measures summarise the levels of uncertainty associated with survey estimates. You are advised to consult the quality measures when interpreting the estimates.

Research into producing confidence intervals around population estimates is continuing; should these become available in the future, users would be able to gain an understanding of the overall accuracy of the Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements rather than only the survey component.

The [Marriages \(Same-sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) made provision for the marriage of same-sex couples in England and Wales from 29 March 2014 onwards. This publication provides an estimate of the number of people in a same-sex marriage by sex. Until sample sizes become large enough to produce robust estimates, data are unlikely to be available by age group. This will be reviewed annually.

The Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements can be used in the production of marriage and divorce rates and also in the estimation of pension liabilities by insurance and pension firms.

The [revisions policy](#) for population statistics is available.