

Statistical bulletin

# Marriages in England and Wales: 2010

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



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Release date:  
29 February 2012

Next release:  
26 June 2013

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# 1 . Correction Notice

## Correction Notice - 6 March 2012

A minor error has been corrected in the figure for the age group of men which had the largest rise in the number of marriages, originally published on 29 February 2012. The age group (45-49) was correctly listed in the key findings but not in the text where it was shown as 40-44. The age group was corrected on 6 March 2012.

ONS apologises for any inconvenience caused.

## 2 . Key findings

- The provisional number of marriages in England and Wales in 2010 increased by 3.7 per cent to 241,100.
- In 2010 the provisional marriage rate increased to 8.7 people marrying per thousand unmarried population aged 16 and over, from 8.5 in 2009.
- Civil ceremonies accounted for 68 per cent of all marriages which took place in 2010, an increase from 64 per cent in 2000.
- The highest number of marriages were for men and women aged 25 to 29.
- The largest percentage increase in numbers from 2009 to 2010 were for men aged 45 to 49 and women aged 30 to 34, both rising by 6 per cent.

## 3 . Summary

This bulletin presents provisional annual statistics on marriages that took place in England and Wales in 2010. The statistics do not include marriages to residents of England and Wales which take place abroad, but do include marriages taking place in England and Wales to non-residents. The statistics are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered as part of civil registration, as required by law.

Marriage statistics are analysed by sex, age, period of occurrence, previous marital status, type of ceremony, religious denomination and area of occurrence.

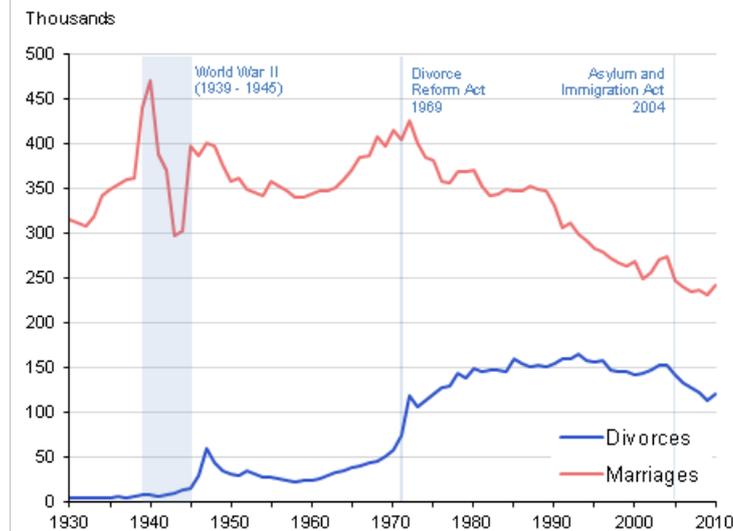
Marriage statistics for 2010 are rounded and provisional. Figures for 2010 will be finalised in early 2013 when the majority of marriage returns have been received from register offices and the clergy. In 2009, the number of marriages in England and Wales increased by approximately 1,000 records between the provisional first release of figures and the finalised statistics.

This is the first time that ONS has published final annual 2009 and provisional annual 2010 marriage statistics for England and Wales.

## 4 . Number of marriages

The provisional number of marriages registered in England and Wales rose by 3.7 per cent in 2010 to 241,100, compared with 232,443 in 2009. The provisional marriage figure for 2010 represents the largest percentage increase in marriages since the 5.7 per cent rise recorded between 2002 and 2003.

## Number of Marriages and Divorces in England and Wales, 1930–2010



The chart above shows the changing trends in the number of marriages and divorces since 1930. The sharp increase in marriages observed around 1940 can be attributed to the start of the Second World War. The number of males aged under 20 and 20 to 24 marrying increased by 77 per cent and 48 per cent respectively between 1938 and 1940. Following this rise, the numbers of marriages declined during the war period of 1941 to 1943 but began to rise again towards the end of the war; the number of marriages increasing by 31 per cent between 1944 and 1945, before remaining relatively stable to 1947.

The number of marriages generally declined between 1947 and 1957 before rising until 1972. This rise was partly a consequence of the increasing population over the same period. As the rate of population increase slowed, the number of marriages continued to increase, but also at a reduced rate. Overall, a long-term decline in the number of marriages has been recorded since 1972, although there have been some increases between 2002 and 2004 and between 2007 and 2008. The decrease in marriages is a likely consequence of the increasing number of couples choosing to cohabit rather than enter into marriage (Beaujouan and Bhrolcháin, 2011).

The largest percentage decline in the number of marriages since 1972 was recorded between 2004 and 2005 when the number of marriages fell by 9.3 per cent. Measures included in the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004 were introduced on 1 February 2005 to prevent the use of marriage to circumvent UK immigration control ('sham marriages'). These measures made it increasingly difficult for a sham marriage to take place and could therefore have reduced the number of such marriages. In addition there may have been people marrying legitimately who were either deterred from marrying or whose marriage was delayed by the legislation (see background note seven for more information on this change in marriage legislation).

The increase in the numbers of marriages between 2009 and 2010 could be due to a reduction in the number of residents of England and Wales marrying abroad. [Population Estimates by Marital Status](#), indicate that there has been a 8 per cent decrease in the estimated number of marriages abroad, from an estimated 80,200 marriages in the year to mid-2009 to 74,000 in mid-2010. Marriages which would otherwise occur abroad may have taken place in England and Wales instead. It is not possible to determine at this stage whether the small rise in the provisional number of marriages in 2010 signifies an end to the long term decline of marriages or whether such increases will continue.

The number of [civil partnerships](#) formed in England and Wales by same-sex couples also saw a slight rise in 2010, increasing to 5,804 compared with 5,687 in 2009. This represents a very small increase of 2 per cent between 2009 and 2010.

## 5 . Marriage rates

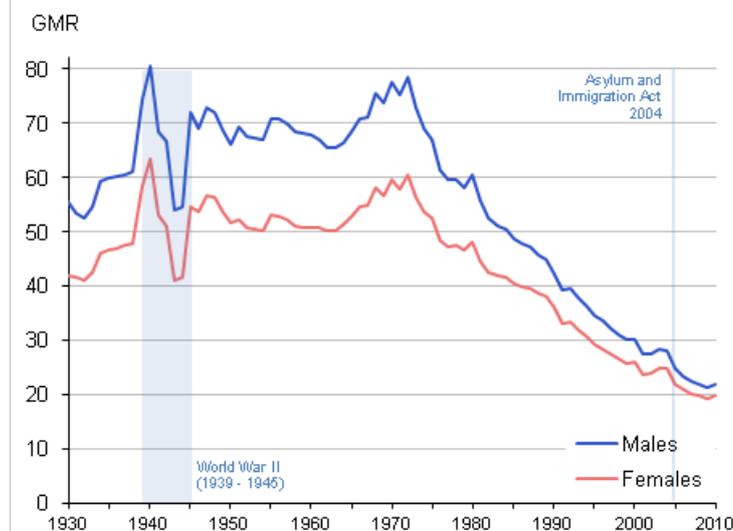
In 2010, the provisional general marriage rate (GMR) in England and Wales increased to 8.7 persons marrying per thousand unmarried population aged 16 and over, from 8.5 in 2009, however remains lower than in 2000 when the GMR was 10.3. This is due to the combination of an increase in the provisional number of marriages in 2010 and a slight rise in the number of unmarried adults.

Changes in the size of the adult population who are unmarried (single, widowed or divorced), and therefore at risk of marriage will affect both the number of marriages and the marriage rate. The rise in the overall marriage rate in 2010 resulted from a 3.7 per cent increase in the number of marriages between 2009 and 2010. The total unmarried adult population also increased slightly over this period (rise of 1.7 per cent). Despite the small increase, the provisional 2010 general marriage rate for England and Wales still represents one of the lowest rates since they were first calculated in 1862, with 2009 being the lowest.

Changes in the size of the unmarried population are determined by patterns of marriage, divorce, mortality and migration. Whilst the actual number of males and females getting married in a particular year is equal, the number of unmarried males and females in the population will differ, hence the different rates (see background note four).

Both the male and female provisional marriage rates increased in 2010. The provisional male marriage rate rose to 21.8 men marrying per 1,000 unmarried men aged 16 and over, from 21.4 in 2009, but remains lower than 30.1 in 2000. The provisional marriage rate for women in 2010 was 19.8 women marrying per 1,000 unmarried women aged 16 and over, compared with 19.3 in 2009 and 25.9 in 2000.

### General Marriage Rate (GMR) in England and Wales, 1930-2010



The overriding trend since 1970 has been a decline in both the number of marriages and the marriage rates. It is widely accepted that this trend is a likely consequence of two related socio-behavioural shifts. Firstly, the increasing numbers of men and women deciding to delay marriage, or not marry at all. And secondly, the increasing number of couples choosing to cohabit rather than enter into marriage, either as a precursor to marriage or as an alternative (Wilson and Smallwood, 2007).

Over the past 20 years, there has been a rise in the number of cohabiting adults in England and Wales. The number of opposite sex cohabiting couple families increased significantly between 2001 and 2011, from 2.1 million to 2.9 million ([Families and Households, 2011](#)). Attitudes towards cohabitation have also changed. The 2006 British Social Attitudes survey found two-thirds of respondents thought there was 'little difference socially between being married and living together as a couple' (Beaujouan and Bhrolcháin, 2011).

The economic downturn may have delayed people from marrying due to financial constraints or instability of relationships as a result of increased financial strain, changes in employment and related lifestyle changes. However, some commentators have noted that during tough economic times, people seek stability and family may be valued more highly than material goods (Bradford Wilcox, 2011).

## 6 . Type of ceremony

The provisional number of civil ceremonies in 2010 was 164,330, accounting for over two-thirds (68 per cent) of all marriages. The proportion of civil ceremonies first exceeded religious ceremonies in 1992.

Provisional figures indicate that the number of marriage ceremonies which took place in approved premises such as hotels, stately homes and historic buildings increased in 2010. There were 124,570 marriage ceremonies which took place in approved premises in 2010, a 12 per cent increase from 2009. Marriages in approved premises accounted for 52 per cent of all marriages in 2010 and 76 per cent of civil marriages. Following their introduction in 1995, there has been a continual increase in the proportion of marriages taking place in approved premises. This coincides with a rise in the number of approved premises licensed for weddings.

Religious marriages other than those solemnised according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, Church in Wales, Society of Friends or of the Jewish religion must usually take place in a building registered for marriages. All buildings registered for marriage must also be certified as a place of worship

The provisional number of religious ceremonies in 2010 was 76,770, an increase of 0.4 per cent compared with 2009. Religious marriages accounted for almost a third of all marriages in 2010 (32 per cent). The number of religious marriages has decreased by 21 per cent since 2000, while in the same period the overall number of marriages decreased by 10 per cent.

For the sixth consecutive year, there were fewer religious ceremonies than ceremonies in approved premises. While not necessarily linked, such trends mirror the findings of the [The Citizenship Survey](#) (Department for Communities and Local Government (2009/10)) whereby research into race and religion found the number of people who declare themselves as Christians in England and Wales had fallen from 77 per cent in 2005 to 70 per cent in 2009-10. Over the same period, the number who say they have no religion rose from 15 per cent to 21 per cent.

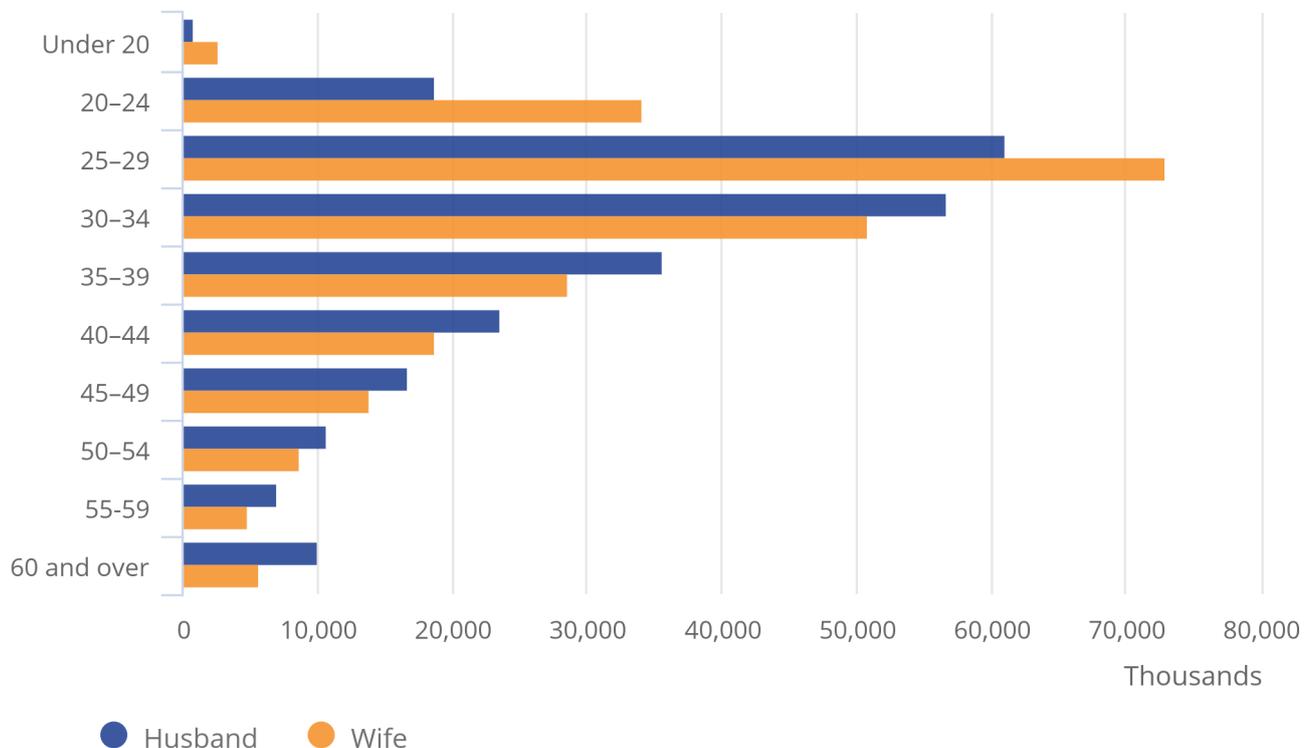
In addition, the [Church of England's](#) (C of E) provisional marriage figures for 2010 suggest that C of E marriages have increased 4 per cent in 2010 to 54,700, from 52,730 in 2009. This has been attributed in part to two schemes adopted by the C of E which aim to make it easier to marry in a C of E church. ONS figures mirror this percentage increase in the number of C of E marriages, while there has been a fall in the number of marriages to 'Other Christian Denominations' of 1.1 per cent. Similarly, the number of ceremonies to 'other' religions, including Sikh, Muslim and Jews, has decreased by 3.4 per cent (see [Table 1, Summary of marriage characteristics](#)).

## 7 . Age at marriage

The chart shows the age at marriage for men and women in 2010. At younger ages there were more women than men marrying; however, at older ages more men than women married. This pattern reflects the trend that, on average, men tend to form relationships with women younger than themselves. In 2010, the number of marriages was highest among men and women aged 25 to 29.

## Age at marriage for men and women, 2010

### Age at marriage for men and women, 2010



Source: Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Figures for 2010 are provisional.

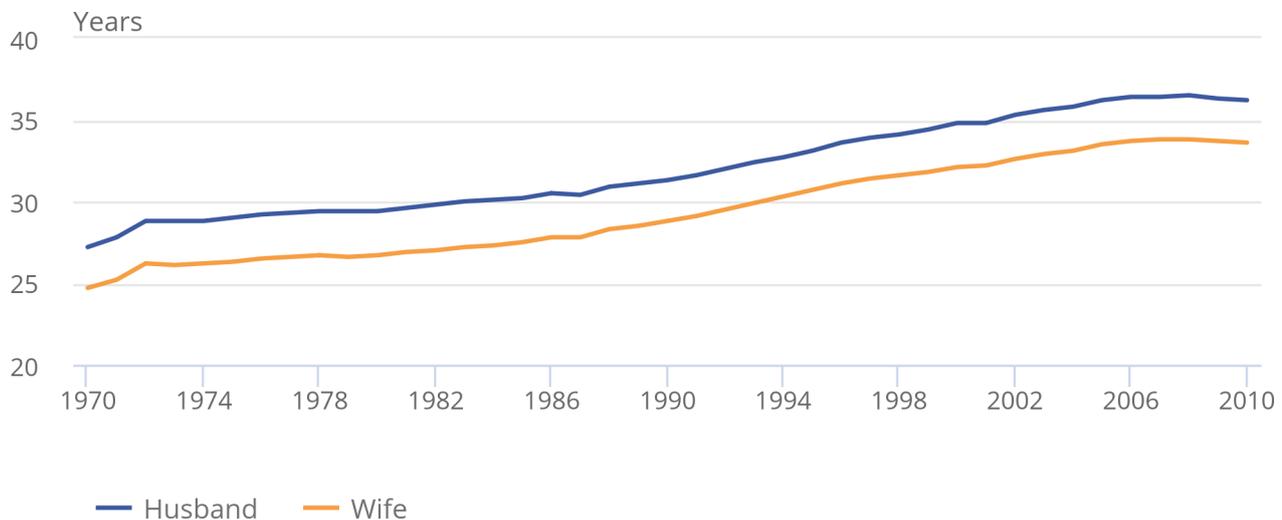
The largest rise in the number of marriages from 2009 to 2010 was for men aged 45 to 49 and women aged 30 to 34, increasing by 5.9 per cent and 6.1 per cent respectively. The only age group which saw a decrease in the numbers of marriages were for men and women aged under 20.

Figures for 2010 saw very slight decreases for both men and women in the mean age at marriage. The provisional mean age for men marrying in 2010 was 36.2 years, a decrease from 36.3 years in 2009. The provisional mean age for women marrying in 2010 was 33.6 years, a decrease from 33.7 years in 2009.

Over the period 1970 to 2008, the mean age at marriage for both men and women has generally increased, before declining slightly between 2008 and 2010. For grooms, the mean age at marriage in 1970 was 27.2 years, compared with 36.2 years in 2010. Women have seen a similar general increase, from 24.7 years in 1970 to 33.6 years in 2010. This may be due to the delay in first marriage and the increasing number of remarriages.

## Mean age at marriage for men and women, 1970-2010

### Mean age at marriage for men and women, 1970-2010



Source: Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Figures for 2010 are provisional.

Since 1970 the mean age at first marriage has also increased by almost eight years for both men and women. This reflects the fact that men and women are delaying getting married. In 2010 the provisional mean age at marriage for never-married men was 32.1 years. The provisional mean age for never-married women was 30.0 years, compared to 24.4 and 22.4 respectively in 1970.

## 8 . Marital status before marriage

Provisional figures show that in 2010 there were 158,980 marriages in England and Wales which were first marriages for both partners. This accounted for 66 per cent of all marriages. This number peaked in 1940 at 426,100 when 91 per cent of all marriages were the first for both partners.

Remarriages for both parties accounted for 15 per cent of all marriages in 2010. The remaining 19 per cent of marriages were to couples where only one partner had been married previously. These proportions are similar to those observed in 2009. Since 2000 the number of marriages that were the first for both parties has remained fairly consistent, increasing by 2 per cent, while remarriages for both parties have decreased more significantly by nearly 28 per cent.

## 9 . Proportion of men and women who had ever married

The proportion of men and women who have ever married has been declining over recent decades. More than 90 per cent of men born in 1930 had ever married by the age of 40 whereas only 63 per cent of men born in 1970 had ever married by the same age. For women born in 1930, 94 per cent had ever married by the age of 40 compared with 71 per cent of those born in 1970.

Men and women in their late teens and twenties have seen the greatest decline in the proportions who have ever married. Of those born in 1931, 51 per cent of men and 75 per cent of women were married by the age of 25 compared with less than 6 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women born in 1985.

These figures reflect the fact that an increasing proportion of men and women are delaying getting married or not marrying at all.

## 10 . Proportion of marriages ending in divorce

The [Divorces in England and Wales, 2010](#) release showed that the percentage of marriages ending in divorce has generally increased for those marrying between the 1970s and the early 1990s. For example, 22 per cent of marriages in 1970 had ended in divorce by the 15th wedding anniversary, whereas 33 per cent of marriages in 1995 had ended after the same period of time. However, there is some evidence that the proportion of marriages ending in divorce had levelled off for couples married in the most recent years.

## 11 . Marriages in the UK

The provisional number of UK marriages in 2010 was 277,740. This is a rise of 4 per cent compared with 2009 when there were 267,898 marriages. The long-term picture for UK marriages has been one of decline, from a peak of 480,285 marriages in 1972, 2010 year being the first increase since 2004.

In Scotland the number of marriages also increased, from 27,524 in 2009 to 28,480 in 2010, a rise of 3.5 per cent.

Northern Ireland experienced a rise in the provisional number of marriages, increasing by 2.8 per cent to 8,156 in 2010, from 7,931 in 2009.

Annual marriages figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#) (see 'Annual Time Series' table).

## 12 . Civil partnerships

Civil partnership formations increased in 2010, after a succession of falling numbers between 2006 and 2009.

The number of civil partnerships formed in the UK by same-sex couples was 6,385 in 2010 compared with 6,281 in 2009. This represents a small increase of 1.7 per cent between 2009 and 2010. The total number of civil partnerships formed in the UK since the Civil Partnership Act came into force in December 2005, up to the end of 2010, is 46,622.

Further statistics on [civil partnerships](#) can be found on the ONS website.

[Civil Partnerships five years on \(190.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) examines civil partnerships in England and Wales, comparing them with the characteristics of those marrying over the same period (2005 to 2010).

## 13 . Users of marriage statistics

ONS uses marriage statistics to:

- produce [population estimates by marital status for England and Wales](#)
- produce [population projections by marital status for England and Wales](#)
- report on social and demographic trends
- perform further analyses, for example determining the [proportion of marriages that end in divorce \(244.2 Kb Pdf\)](#), and comparisons with civil partnership formations ([Civil Partnerships five years on \(190.1 Kb Pdf\)](#))

ONS marriage statistics are used by Government departments, for example the UK Border Agency, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Education. The demography unit at DWP uses the marital status estimates, which are compiled using marriage statistics, to feed into statistical models for pensions and benefits. Other Government departments, such as the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), use marriage statistics indirectly by using the marital status estimates and projections in household projections for planning and policy making purposes.

The distinction between cohabitation and marriage is of importance to policy makers too, as well as to social and political commentators. Issues of policy interest include legal rights and responsibilities of cohabiting partners, the welfare of children of unmarried parents, concern about the stability of family forms, housing demand, and lone parent families.

Organisations such as Eurostat and those in the voluntary sector use ONS marriage statistics for comparison purposes and also to support campaigns. These organisations often pass on ONS's marriage statistics to their own users.

Lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law, as well as academics and researchers in demography and social sciences, are often interested in marriage statistics.

Those involved in the 'marriage business' for example hotels and catering businesses, bridal shops and wedding planners often wish to see marriage statistics. The clergy and in particular the Church of England are also interested in marriage statistics by area, and the number of religious marriages taking place each year.

## 14. Further information

More data on [marriages in England and Wales](#) in 2010 are available on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website.

[ONS marriages metadata \(159.5 Kb Pdf\)](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages.

The [ONS marriages quality report \(214.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) provides overview notes which pull together key qualitative information on the various dimensions of quality as well as providing a summary of methods used to compile the output.

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

National Records of Scotland provide [marriage statistics for Scotland](#).

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency provide [marriage statistics for Northern Ireland](#).

Further statistics on [divorces](#), [civil partnership and civil partnership dissolutions](#), [families and households](#) and [cohabitation estimates](#) are available on the ONS website.

[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. Estimates show that the proportion of the adult population who are married has continued to decline to mid-2010 continuing the long-term trends seen since mid-1971. In contrast, the proportion of the population who are divorced continues to rise.

[Population projections by marital status for England and Wales](#).

## 15. References

[Bradford Wilcox, W. \(2011\)](#) 'The Great Recession and Marriage. National Marriage Project'. National Marriage Project, University of Virginia. [Accessed 20 February 2012].

[Beaujouan, E. and Bhrolcháin, M. \(2011\)](#) Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s, Population Trends 145, 35-59.

## 16. Background notes

1. These figures relate only to marriages solemnised in England and Wales. Marriages of England and Wales residents that take place outside England and Wales are not accounted for in this bulletin. Marriages of persons whose usual residence is outside England and Wales, but whose marriage takes place in England and Wales are included in the figures.
2. Figures for 2010 are rounded and provisional. Annual marriage statistics are finalised when the majority of returns have been received from register offices and the clergy. In 2009, the number of marriages in England and Wales increased by approximately 1,000 records between the provisional first release of figures and the finalised statistics.

It is estimated that a further 1 per cent of 2010 marriage returns will be received from register offices and the clergy over the next year allowing final details of marriages in 2010 to be released in early 2013.

Further information can be found in the [ONS marriages metadata \(159.5 Kb Pdf\)](#).

3. The population estimates by marital status used to calculate rates in this bulletin are the latest available. Further information on [Population estimates by marital status](#) can be found on the ONS website.
4. Marriage rates were first calculated in 1862. The General Marriage Rate (GMR) referred to in this bulletin, shows the number of men or women marrying per 1,000 unmarried men or women aged 16 and over. The GMR takes account of changes in the size of the unmarried adult population in England and Wales as well as the number of marriages.

5. 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.

The mean age (also known as the average age) is obtained by adding together the ages of all the people concerned and dividing by the number of people. In contrast the median age is the age of the person in the middle of the group, such that one half of the group is younger than that person and the other half is older.

The median and mean ages do not coincide here as the age distribution is not symmetrical. Marriage may take place at any age from 16 upwards, but the majority occur much nearer 16 than, for example 70. The effect is that the mean is greater than the median.

6. Approved premises are buildings such as hotels and stately homes licensed by local authorities under the Marriage Act 1994, for the solemnisation of civil marriages. In addition, some local authorities have made accommodation available for civil marriage as approved premises in place of register offices. This provision for marriages in approved premises came into effect on 1 April 1995.
7. In February 2005, The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Act 2004 made various changes to the procedure for marriage for anyone subject to immigration control, broadly speaking non-EEA nationals. Where any individual to be married is subject to immigration control and is marrying in England and Wales by superintendent registrar's certificate, they must give notice in one of 76 designated register offices and meet a qualifying condition. A person subject to immigration control needs a certificate of approval from the Home Office unless he or she has a marriage visa or settled status. The same legislation applies to Scotland and Northern Ireland but it does not apply to Anglican marriages after banns or by licence in England and Wales. The purpose of this legislation was to counter the use of marriage to circumvent UK immigration control ('sham marriages'). On 4 April 2011 Parliament approved a Remedial Order to abolish the certificate of approval scheme on human rights grounds. The scheme ended in May 2011. The UK Border Agency are working with the General Register Offices across the UK, local registration services and the Anglican Church to tackle sham marriages.
8. Special extracts and tabulations of divorce data for England and Wales are available to order for a charge (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreement of costs, where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to:

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9. We welcome feedback from users on the content, format and relevance of this release. User Engagement in the Health and Life Events Division is available to download from the ONS website. Please send feedback to the postal or e-mail address above.
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13. Next publication: February 2013

Issued by: Office for National Statistics  
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14. 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)

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