

Statistical bulletin

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2020

Annual estimates of population by legal marital status and cohabitation status by age and sex for England and Wales.



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1 . Main points

- Married or civil partnered remained the most common legal partnership status in 2020, accounting for just over half (50.6%) of the population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales; this is similar to the figure for 2019, but lower than the proportion seen a decade ago.
- The proportion of the married population who are aged 70 years and over (18.5%) is five times the proportion who are aged under 30 years (3.7%) in 2020, reflecting an ageing married population.
- Females still comprise the greatest proportion of the widowed population, but the gap is narrowing; in 2010, females made up 77.2% of the widowed population and males 22.8%, however by 2020 this had reduced to 72.6% for females and increased to 27.4% for males, reflecting increases in male life expectancy over time.
- The majority (61.3%) of the population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales were living in a couple in 2020, including those in legally-registered partnerships and those cohabiting.
- The population who are cohabiting is growing; in 2020 13.1% of the population aged 16 years and over were cohabiting, compared with 11.3% in 2010.
- The majority of people aged 55 years and over who are cohabiting have previously been in a legal partnership, however we have seen increases in the last decade, particularly for those aged 55 to 64 years, who are cohabiting having never been in a legal partnership.

2 . Marital status and living arrangements data

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 16 December 2021

Annual estimates of population by marital status and living arrangements by age group and sex in England and Wales.

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England](#)

Dataset | Released 16 December 2021

Annual estimates of population by marital status and living arrangements by age group and sex in England only.

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 16 December 2021

Annual estimates of population by marital status and living arrangements by age group and sex in Wales only.

3 . Measuring the data

The [Marriage \(Same-Sex Couples\) 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 [Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registrations etc\) Act 2019](#) received royal assent on 29 March 2019 and made provision for opposite-sex civil partnerships to be formed in England and Wales from 31 December 2019. The estimates for civil partnerships in this publication therefore include both opposite-sex and same-sex civil partnerships. It is not currently possible to separate these into same-sex and opposite-sex.

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 never married or civil partnered in line with the legal age of marriage or civil partnership in England and Wales.

These data are for 2020 and may be affected by the impact of postponed weddings and civil partnerships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) roundup](#) highlighted an estimated 73,600 weddings and same-sex civil-partnership ceremonies may have been postponed in England during the three-month period of lockdown restrictions between 23 March and 3 July 2020. As this publication is based on a sample survey and covers the overall number of people in the population aged 16 years and over within each legal partnership status, it is difficult to identify the impact of this on our estimates.

Quality

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements QMI](#).

4 . Related links

[Marriages in England and Wales: 2018](#)

Bulletin | Released 10 August 2021

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

[Divorces in England and Wales: 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 17 November 2020

Annual divorce numbers and rates, by duration of marriage, sex, age, previous marital status, and to whom granted and reason.

[Civil Partnerships in England and Wales: 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 13 December 2021

Annual statistics on formations and dissolutions of civil partnerships analysed by the sex, age, and previous marital status of the couples and the place of registration.

[Labour Force Survey – user guidance](#)

User guide | Released 19 August 2021

Guidance about the background and methodology of the Labour Force Survey (LFS).