

Statistical bulletin

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2018

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

- The proportion of the population aged 16 years and over in England and Wales who are married has continued to decline in 2018 to 50.5%, down from 51.0% in 2017.
- Whilst the proportion of the population under age 70 years who are married has declined, the proportion aged 70 years and over who are married has increased from 50.3% in 2008 to 55.8% in 2018.
- The number of people aged 16 years and over who are single and have never married has continued to increase, rising by 369,000 from 2017, to a total of 16.7 million people (35.0%) in 2018.
- The number of people aged 16 years and over who live with a partner and have never married has continued to increase, rising by 1.3 million people since 2008, to a total of 5.0 million (10.4%) in 2018.

2 . Statistician's comment

"In England and Wales, around half of the population aged 16 years and over were married in 2018. The proportion of people married has been in decline over the last decade, while the single population has been increasing.

"However, those in their 70s and beyond are seeing a different trend where, despite a modest rise in the divorced population, the proportion of people aged 70 years and over who are married has been increasing at a greater rate."

Edward Morgan, Centre for Ageing and Demography, 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.

This bulletin presents analysis of both the proportion of the population by marital status and living arrangements, and the size of the population in numbers. The population of England and Wales has increased since 2002 and therefore numbers of people in most marital status and living arrangement categories have also increased over this time period. The relative sizes of the population in each category, measured by proportions, are not affected by the changes in size of the population and therefore reflect changes in patterns of marital status and living arrangement.

Our published datasets refer to the years 2002 to 2018. Comparisons over time in this bulletin are made primarily during the 10-year period from 2008 to 2018.

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. The LFS does not cover the 2% of the population who live in communal establishments, such as prisons and nursing homes.

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

- single, never married or never had a civil partnership
- 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. There are three categories for people living in a couple: married or civil partnered, cohabiting and never married or civil partnered, and cohabiting and previously married or civil partnered. The two categories for people not living in a couple are never married or civil partnered, and previously married or civil partnered. This bulletin provides estimates for individuals and their status, and not the number of couples or marriage, divorce or civil partnership events.

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

4 . How have patterns of marital status changed over the last decade?

Patterns of marital status in England and Wales have changed over time. In 2018, just over half of the population (50.5%) in England and Wales were married. The second-largest proportion was the single (never married or civil-partnered) population at 35.0%, followed by divorced at 8.0%, widowed at 6.4% and civil partnered at 0.2%.

Whilst the size of the married population increased between 2008 and 2018 (because of overall increases in population size), there has been a decline in the proportion of the population who are married (Figure 1). Since 2008, the proportion of men married has fallen by 1.8 percentage points from 53.3% to 51.5% and women by 1.3 percentage points from 50.8% to 49.5%.

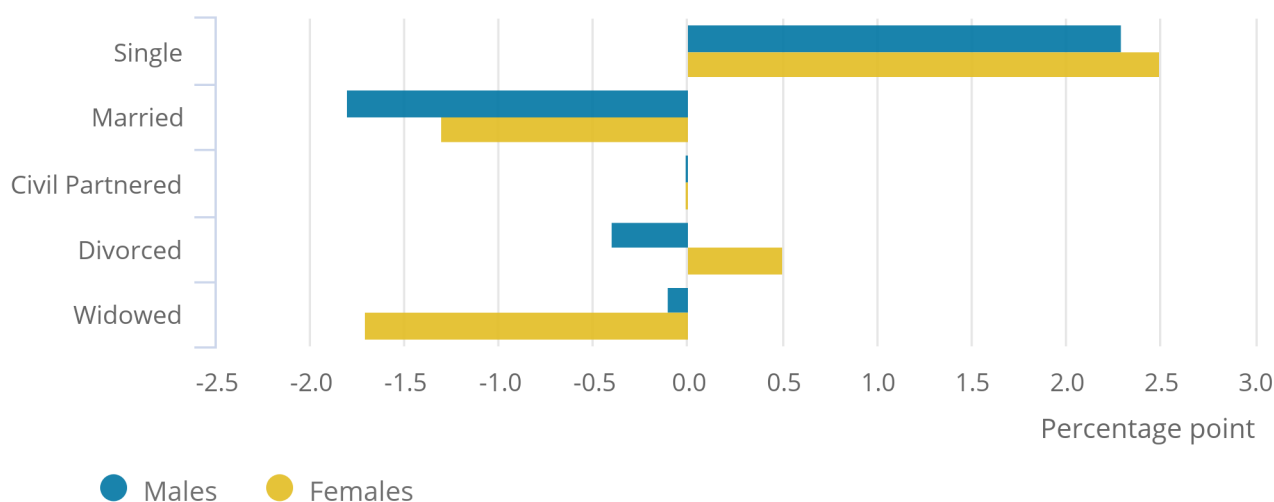
Since 2017, the share of people who are single has increased by 0.6 percentage points from 33.8% to 34.4%. This follows an ongoing trend where the percentage of the population who are single has been increasing (shown in Figure 1).

Figure 1: The proportion of the population who are single has risen whilst the proportion of the married population has been in decline

Percentage point change of marital status of people aged 16 years and over, 2008 to 2018, by sex, England and Wales

Figure 1: The proportion of the population who are single has risen whilst the proportion of the married population has been in decline

Percentage point change of marital status of people aged 16 years and over, 2008 to 2018, by sex, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Single males are more common than single females, with 38.4% of men single in contrast to 31.7% of women in 2018. Part of the reason for this is that people who are single are more common at the younger ages and the sex-ratio for the population aged under 30 years is biased in favour of males (52 in every 100 people aged under 30 years are male). Given the probability of being single is based upon a population with more males, single males are more common than single females.

The proportion of the population who are widowed has declined for females in England and Wales, and remained broadly the same for males over time.

Since 2008, the proportion of widows (women) has declined by 1.7 percentage points from 10.9% to 9.2%. This decline could be associated with life expectancy improvements between 2008 and 2018 as more people living longer lives may delay widowhood. However, changes in the proportion of the population who are widowed are also affected by changes in the married and divorced populations. It is possible more women who are widowed go on to remarry and therefore change their marital status.

The proportions of the population who are civil partnered or divorced have seen little change since 2008.

5 . The demography of the married population continues to shift

The age distribution of the married population has shifted over the last 10 years between 2008 and 2018. In 2008, the age group with the highest proportion married was 60- to 64-year-olds, at 74.8%. In 2018, 55- to 59-year-olds had the highest proportion married at 69.0%. However, this is lower than the 2008 figure for 55- to 59-year-olds of 73.8% reflecting the overall decline in the relative size of the married population.

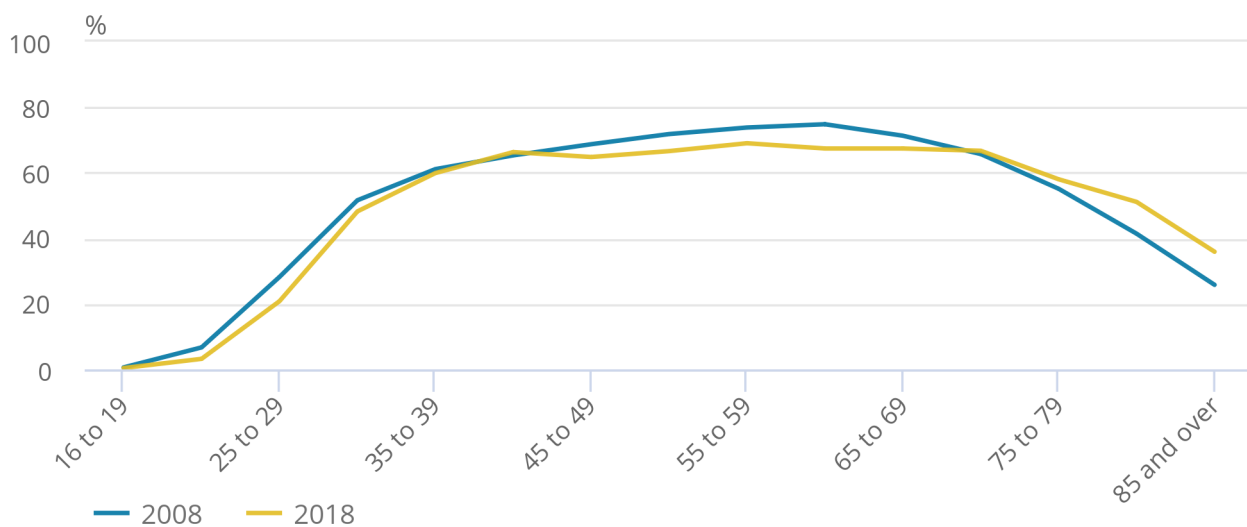
The decline in the proportion of the population who are married has not been consistent across all ages (Figure 2). The majority of the decrease has been concentrated between ages 20 to 34 years and 45 to 69 years. This pattern may be explained by the increasing trend for people at younger ages to [postpone marriage](#) and increasing numbers of people choosing not to get married at all. Meanwhile, the population aged 70 years and over saw an increase in the proportion who were married.

Figure 2: The proportion of the population married at aged 70 years and over has increased whilst the proportion of the population under 70 years married has decreased

Percentages of married people aged 16 years and over in 2008 and 2018, England and Wales

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Percentages of married people aged 16 years and over in 2008 and 2018, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

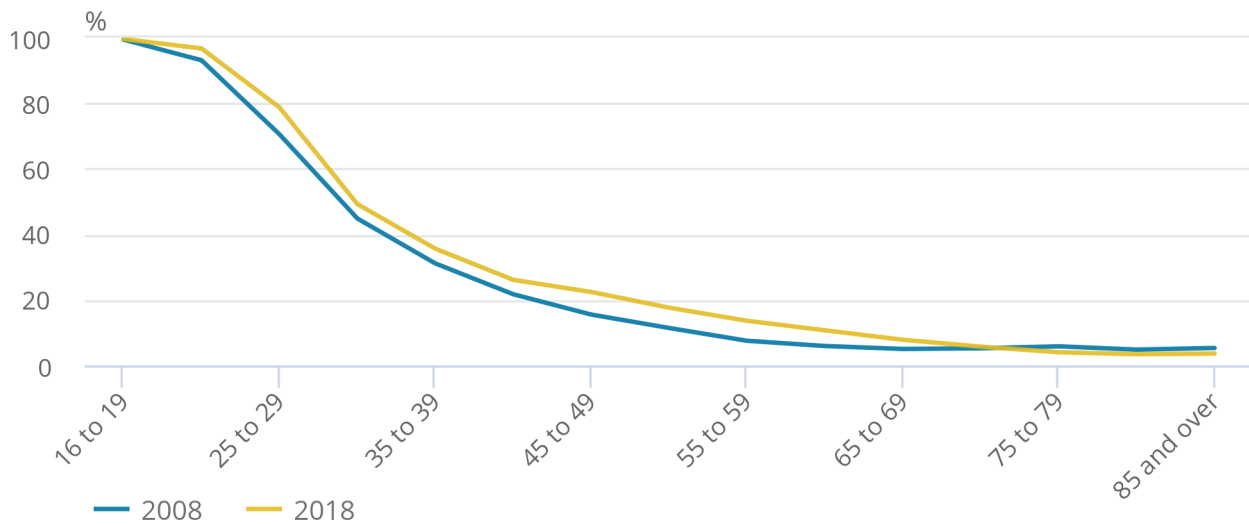
Figure 3 shows the opposite pattern is observed for the single population where the proportion of people who are single has increased in all age groups under 75 years and decreased in age groups 75 years and over.

Figure 3: The proportion of the single population has increased for all ages under 75 years

Percentage of single people aged 16 years and over, by age, in 2008 and 2018, England and Wales

Figure 3: The proportion of the single population has increased for all ages under 75 years

Percentage of single people aged 16 years and over, by age, in 2008 and 2018, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Whilst overall the proportion of the population who are divorced has remained broadly the same over time, the age profile of the divorced population has also shifted since 2008 (Figure 4).

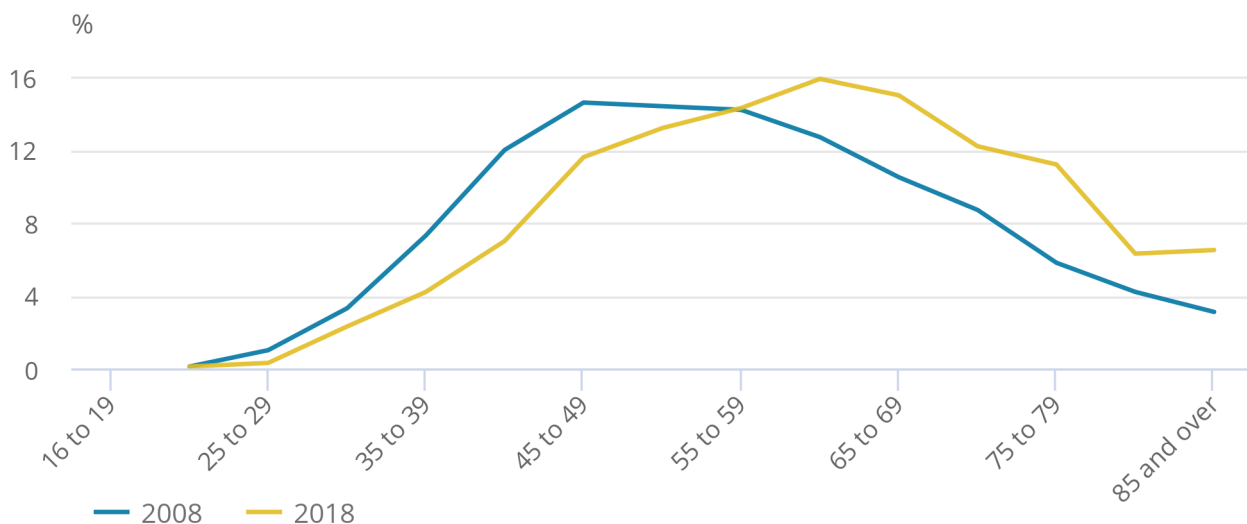
A smaller share of people under the age of 55 years were divorced in 2018 whilst the share of the divorced population has risen for those aged 55 years and over. This could be partly because of people increasingly getting married later in life. Despite the rise in the proportion of the divorced population who were aged 70 years and over in 2018, the rise of the size of the married population who are 70 years and over has been greater.

Figure 4: Higher proportions of the population aged 55 years and over were divorced in 2018 than in 2008

Percentages of divorced people aged 16 years and over, by age, in 2008 and 2018, England and Wales

Figure 4: Higher proportions of the population aged 55 years and over were divorced in 2018 than in 2008

Percentages of divorced people aged 16 years and over, by age, in 2008 and 2018, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Increase in people in same-sex marriage

Between 2017 and 2018, the number of people in England and Wales in a same-sex marriage increased from around 68,000 to around 120,000 (78.0%).

Whilst this increase in the number of people in a same-sex marriage appears large, this is a small share of the overall population (0.5% in 2018, up from 0.3% in 2017). The increase is likely because of the relatively recent introduction of same-sex marriage in 2014. Because of small sample sizes for people in same-sex marriages in the Labour Force Survey, these estimates are also more prone to greater annual fluctuation.

6 . How has the way we live changed over the last decade?

As patterns of marital status have changed, so have patterns of living arrangements. In 2018, 61.4% of the population (29.3 million) were living with a partner in England and Wales. This breaks down to:

- 48.3% of the population were living as “married or civil partner couples”
- 10.4% of the population as “cohabiting, never married or civil partnered”
- 2.7% of the population as “cohabiting, previously married or civil partnered”

The remaining 38.6% (18.5 million) were not living as couples. This includes those living alone, living with friends or with other family members.

Men (62.9%) were slightly more likely to be living with a partner than women (60.0%) in 2018. However, the proportion of women not living with a partner, but previously married or civil partnered (18.3%), was nearly twice that of men (9.6%).

The proportion of men and women living with a partner has remained unchanged since 2017, although a longer-term trend since 2008 shows an increase (Figure 5). For men, the increase is because of higher proportions cohabiting (not married or civil partnered) (up 2.1%), which has offset the decreasing proportion of men living in a married or civil partnered couple (down 1.9%).

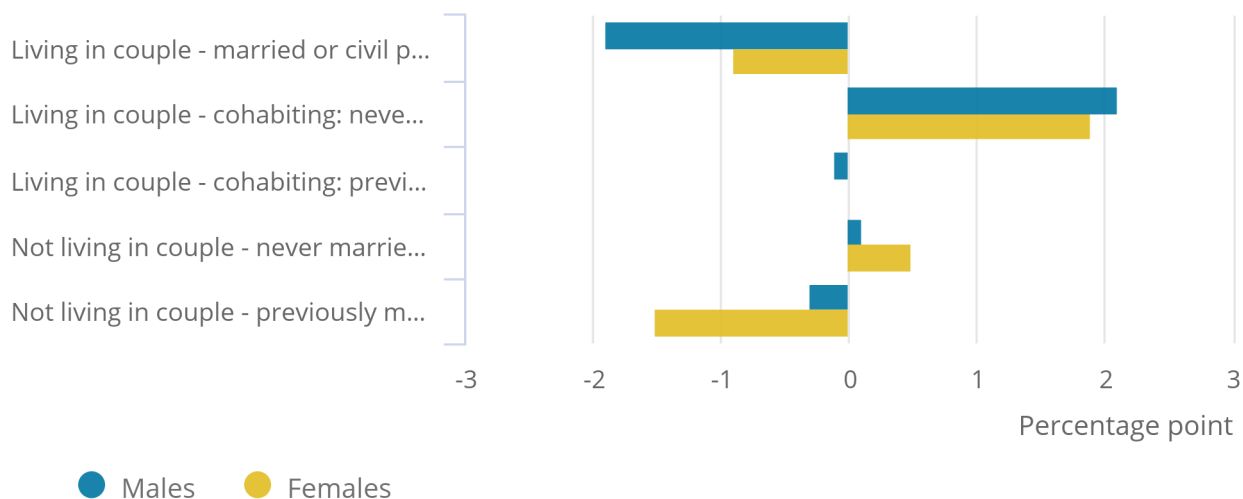
While this pattern is the same for women, there is also a fall in the proportion of women not living in a couple, but previously married. This is likely driven by the reduction in the proportion of widows.

Figure 5: The proportion of cohabiting couples has increased

Percentage point change of living arrangements of people aged 16 years and over, 2008 to 2018, by sex, England and Wales

Figure 5: The proportion of cohabiting couples has increased

Percentage point change of living arrangements of people aged 16 years and over, 2008 to 2018, by sex, England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

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 category 'not living in a couple: previously married or civil partnered'.

Not living with a partner has become less common for those aged 70 years and over. This trend reflects a rise in the proportion of people aged 70 years and over who are married.

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.

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

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 2012 to 2017 have been revised following the re-weighting of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 2018. The majority of changes to the estimates have been minimal, with only one category: civil partnered, aged 75 to 79 years (all persons), experiencing a large revision.

For this category, a 32.5% difference in the size of the estimate was calculated. Whilst this difference appears large, the absolute changes in population size are small. Due to small sample sizes for people in civil partnerships in the Labour Force Survey, these estimates are also more prone to greater fluctuation.

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 Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths \(Registrations Etc.\) Act](#), which received Royal Assent on 29 March 2019, contains provisions for regulations to be made to extend eligibility for forming a civil partnership to opposite-sex couples in England and Wales. This is expected to come into effect by 31 December 2019.

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