

Statistical bulletin

# Marriages in England and Wales (Provisional): 2011

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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# 1 . Key findings

- In 2011, the provisional number of marriages in England and Wales increased by 1.7% to 247,890, from 243,808 in 2010.
- In 2011, the male marriage rate remained at 22.0 marriages per thousand unmarried men aged 16 and over. For women the rate decreased to 19.8 per thousand unmarried women aged 16 and over, from 20.0 in 2010.
- Civil ceremonies accounted for 70% of all marriages that took place in 2011, an increase from 64% in 2010.
- The greatest number of marriages were for men and women aged 25 to 29.
- The largest percentage increase in the number of marriages between 2010 to 2011 was for women aged 55 to 59 and for men aged 60 and over, rising by 6.9% and 6.5% respectively.

## 2 . Summary

This bulletin presents provisional annual statistics for marriages that took place in England and Wales in 2011. The statistics do not include marriages to residents of England and Wales that took place abroad, but do include marriages that took place in England and Wales to non-residents. The statistics are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement.

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 2011 are rounded and provisional. Figures for 2011 will be finalised in early 2014 when the majority of marriage returns have been received from register offices and the clergy. In 2010, the number of marriages in England and Wales increased by 2,700 (1.1%) between the provisional first release of figures and the finalised statistics.

This is the first time that ONS has published final 2010 and provisional 2011 marriage statistics for England and Wales.

The publication of Marriages in England and Wales (provisional) 2011 is later than originally planned. This has been necessary given changes in data collection methodology (see background note 3 for more information) to allow for delays in recording marriage entries and to allow time for detailed quality assurance. In the future, once the new data collection processes are well established, ONS hope to bring forward the release of final annual marriage statistics to around 15 months after the end of the data year. This would mean that final annual figures would be released around the time that provisional figures are currently published and the provisional publication would be discontinued. ONS will monitor the receipt of marriage registrations over the next year to determine whether such a change is possible.

## 3 . Number of marriages

The provisional number of marriages registered in England and Wales rose by 1.7% in 2011 to 247,890, compared with 243,808 in 2010. This increase in the provisional marriage figure for 2011 continues the rise recorded since 2009.

**Figure 1: Number of Marriages and Divorces, 1931–2011**

**England and Wales**

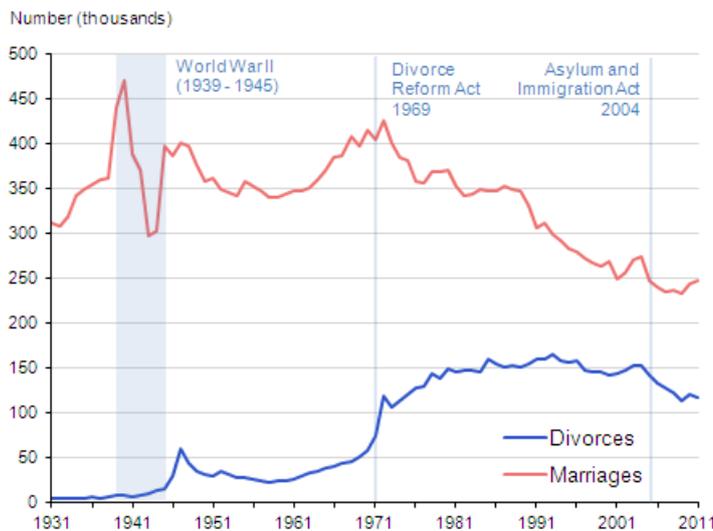


Figure 1 shows the changing trends in the number of marriages and divorces in England and Wales since 1931. The sharp increase in marriages observed around 1940 can be attributed to the start of the Second World War. The number of males aged under 20 and 20 to 24 marrying increased by 77% and 48% respectively between 1938 and 1940. Following this rise, the number 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 increased by 31% 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 was recorded between 1972 and 2009, 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 \(562.2 Kb Pdf\)](#)).

Since 2009, the number of marriages has increased each year to 2011. It is not possible to determine at this stage whether the rising number of marriages between 2009 and 2011 is indicative an end to the long term decline between 1972 and 2009.

The increase in the number of marriages between 2009 and 2011 could be due to a reduction in the number of residents of England and Wales marrying abroad. Estimates derived from the International Passenger Survey suggest an approximate 40% decrease in the number of UK residents marrying abroad, from an estimated 92,000 marriages in 2009 to 55,000 in 2011. Marriages that would otherwise have occurred abroad may have taken place in England and Wales instead. Another possible factor contributing to the increase in marriages between 2010 and 2011 could be the removal of the Certificate of Approval Scheme making it easier for legitimate marriages involving persons subject to immigration control to take place.

The number of [civil partnerships](#) formed in England and Wales by same-sex couples also rose in 2011, increasing to 6,152 compared with 5,804 in 2010 (an increase of 6%).

Over the past 20 years, there has been a rise in the number of cohabiting adults in the UK. 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, 2012](#)). 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](#)).

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%. The Certificate of Approval Scheme included in the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004 was introduced on 1 February 2005 to prevent the use of marriage to circumvent UK immigration control ('sham marriages'). The scheme 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. These measures were abolished in May 2011. Entering into a sham marriage does not entitle migrants to any right to remain in the UK. The Home Office continues to investigate suspected abuse with assistance from Registrars and members of the clergy, disrupting marriages where possible, before they take place. See background note 8 for more information on these changes in marriage legislation.

## 4 . Marriage rates

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 thousand 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.

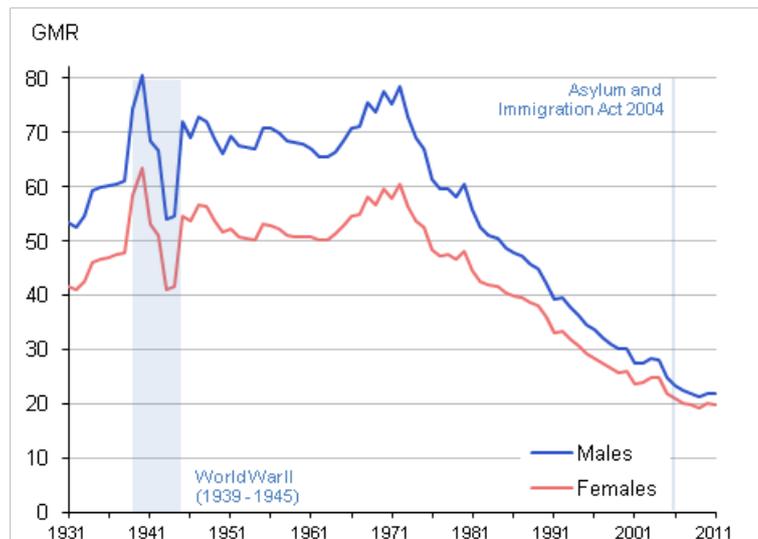
Changes in the size of the unmarried population are determined by patterns of marriage, divorce, mortality and migration. While the actual number of males and females getting married in a particular year is equal, the number of unmarried males and females in the population will differ, hence the different rates (see background note 5).

The provisional male GMR in 2011 was 22.0 men marrying per thousand unmarried men aged 16 and over, compared with 22.0 in 2010 and 27.4 in 2001. The provisional GMR for women in 2011 was 19.8 women marrying per thousand unmarried women aged 16 and over, compared with 20.0 in 2010 and 23.7 in 2001 (Figure 2).

Changes in the size of the adult population who are unmarried (single, widowed or divorced), and therefore able to marry will affect both the number of marriages and the marriage rate. The fall in the female GMR between 2010 and 2011 resulted from a 2.4% increase in the unmarried female population between 2010 and 2011. For males, the 1.9% increase in the unmarried male population and the 1.7% increase in the number of marriages counteracted each other and the male GMR remained unchanged from 2010. The provisional 2011 GMRs for England and Wales still represent some of the lowest rates since they were first calculated in 1862, with 2009 being the lowest.

**Figure 2: General Marriage Rate (GMR), 1931–2011**

England and Wales



## 5 . Type of ceremony

The provisional number of civil ceremonies in 2011 was 174,600, accounting for 70% of all marriages. The proportion of civil ceremonies first exceeded religious ceremonies in 1976.

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 2011. There were 143,220 marriage ceremonies which took place in approved premises in 2011, a 14% increase from 2010. Marriages in approved premises accounted for 58% of all marriages in 2011 and 82% 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 2011 was 73,290, a decrease of 6.2% compared with 2010. Religious marriages accounted for less than a third of all marriages in 2011 (30%). The number of religious marriages has decreased by 18% since 2001, while in the same period the overall number of marriages decreased by 0.5%.

For the seventh consecutive year, there were fewer religious ceremonies than ceremonies in approved premises. While not necessarily linked, such trends mirror the findings of the [2011 Census](#) where the number of people who declare themselves as Christians in England and Wales had fallen from 72% in 2001 to 59% in 2011. Over the same period, the number reporting no religion rose from 15% to 25%.

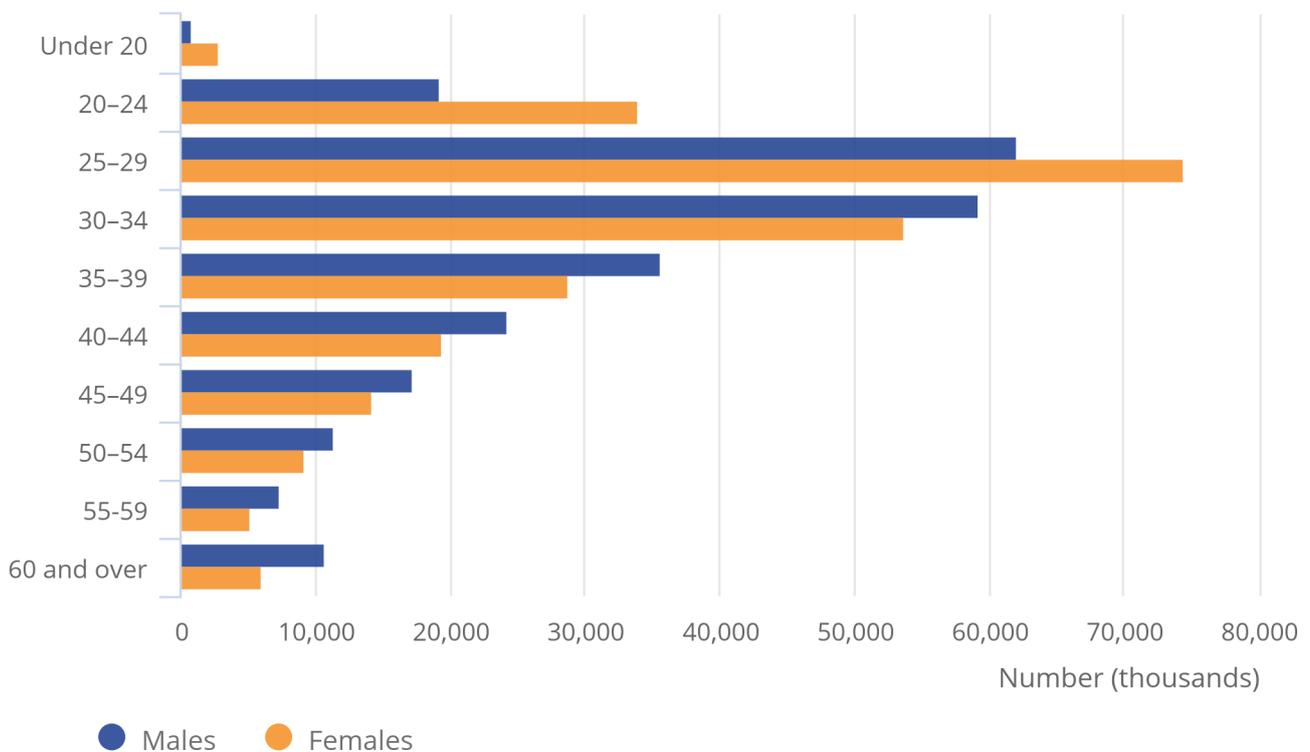
Provisional marriage figures for 2011 suggest that Church of England and Church in Wales marriages have decreased by 6.8% in 2011 to 53,700, from 57,607 in 2010. Similarly there has been a fall in the number of marriages to 'Other Christian Denominations' of 3.9% and Roman Catholics of 4.4%. The number of ceremonies to 'other' religions, including Sikh, Muslim and Jews, have also decreased by 6.9% (see Table 1, [Summary of marriage characteristics \(215.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

## 6 . Age at marriage

Figure 3 shows the age at marriage for men and women in 2011. At younger ages there were more women than men marrying; however, at older ages more men than women married. This pattern reflects that, on average, men tend to form relationships with women younger than themselves. In 2011, the number of marriages was greatest among men and women aged 25 to 29.

**Figure 3: Age at marriage for men and women, 2011**

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**Source: Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

1. Figures for 2011 are provisional.

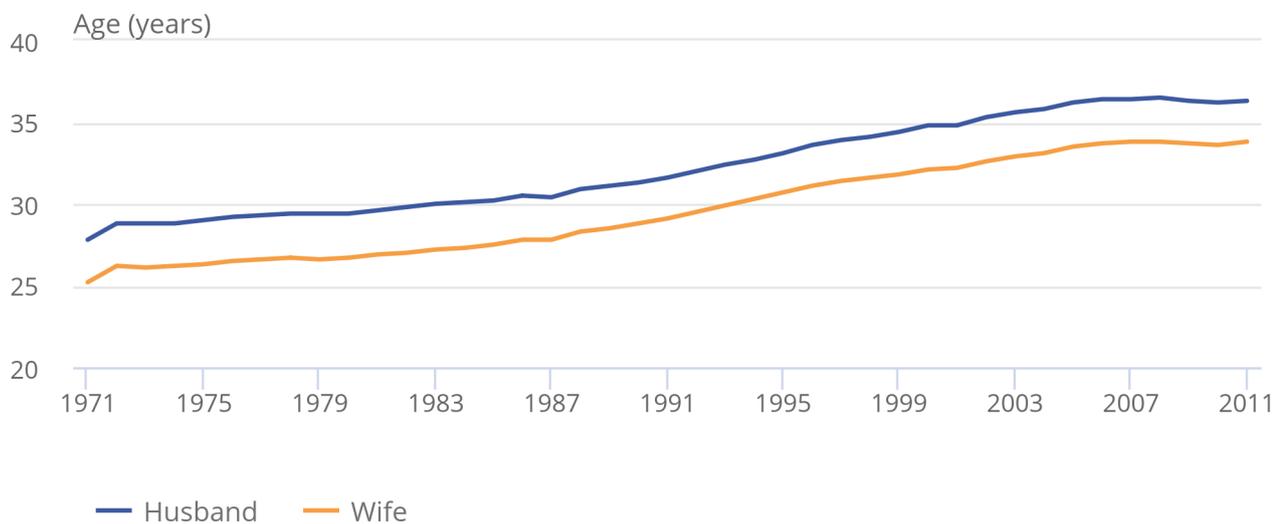
The largest percentage increase in the number of marriages from 2010 to 2011 was for women aged 55 to 59 and men aged 60 and over, increasing by 6.9% and 6.5% respectively. The age groups which saw the greatest decrease in the numbers of marriages were for women aged 20 to 24 and men aged 35 to 39, with both age groups decreasing by 1.5%.

The mean age at marriage saw a slight increase for both men and women in 2011. The provisional mean age for men marrying in 2011 was 36.3 years, an increase from 36.2 years in 2010. The provisional mean age for women marrying in 2011 was 33.8 years, an increase from 33.6 years in 2010.

Over the period 1971 to 2011, the mean age at marriage for both men and women generally increased (Figure 4). For grooms, the mean age at marriage in 1971 was 27.8 years, compared with 36.3 years in 2011. For brides, the mean age at marriage in 1971 was 25.2 years, compared with 33.8 years in 2011. These increases result from people deciding to delay entering into a first marriage and to a lesser extent increases in the proportion of marriages to divorced men and women where the mean age at marriage has risen (see Tables 6 and 7, [Age at marriage and previous marital status \(586.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) ).

**Figure 4: Mean age at marriage for men and women, 1971-2011**

Figure 4: Mean age at marriage for men and women, 1971-2011



**Source: Office for National Statistics**

**Notes:**

1. Figures for 2011 are provisional.

Since 1971 the mean age at first marriage has increased by over eight years for both men and women. In 2011 the provisional mean age at marriage for never-married men was 32.2 years while for never-married women it was 30.2 years. This compares with 24.6 years and 22.6 years respectively in 1971.

## 7 . Marital status before marriage

Provisional figures show that in 2011, 164,470 marriages in England and Wales were first marriages for both partners. This accounted for 66% of all marriages. This number peaked in 1940 at 426,100 when 91% of all marriages were the first for both partners.

Remarriages for both parties accounted for 15% of all marriages in 2011. The remaining 19% of marriages were to couples where only one partner had been married previously. The proportion of marriages that were the first for both parties has gradually increased since 1996 (rise of 8.7 percentage points), while remarriages for one or both parties have decreased over the same period (fall of 4.1 and 4.6 percentage points respectively).

## 8 . Proportion of men and women who have ever married

The proportion of men and women who have ever married has been declining over recent decades. Of those born in 1930, 90% of men and 94% of women had ever married by age 40. In contrast, of those born in 1970, 63% of men and 71% of women had ever married by the same age.

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 1930, 51% of men and 74% of women were married by the age of 25 compared with 5% of men and 11% of women born in 1986 (the most recent birth cohort to reach age 25 in marriage data).

These figures reflect the increasing proportion of men and women choosing to delay marriage or not get married at all.

## 9 . Proportion of marriages ending in divorce

[What percentage of marriages end in divorce?](#), published by ONS, shows that the estimated percentage of marriages ending in divorce (assuming 2010 divorce and mortality rates throughout the duration of marriage) is 42%. Around half of these divorces occur in the first 10 years of marriage.

Further estimates suggest:

- that 34% of marriages are expected to end in divorce by the 20th wedding anniversary
- an additional 6% of marriages are expected to end by the 20th wedding anniversary because one of the spouses has died
- therefore 60% of marriages are expected to survive to the 20th anniversary
- in addition to this, 16% of marriages reach the 60th wedding anniversary
- the average marriage is expected to last for 32 years

For those marrying in the most recent years, since 2000, the percentage of marriages ending in divorce appears to be falling. This recent decrease may be related to the following two factors:

- the age at which people first marry has been increasing, ( [Wilson and Smallwood, 2008 \(244.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) ) suggests that those marrying at older ages have a lower risk of divorce
- cohabitation has increased in recent years. ( [Beaujouan and Bhrolcháin, 2011 \(283.5 Kb Pdf\)](#) ) shows that people often live together before getting married, and this may act to filter out weaker relationships from progressing to marriage

## 10 . Marriages in the UK

The provisional number of UK marriages in 2011 was 285,390. This is a rise of 1.8% compared with 2010 when there were 280,444 marriages. The long-term picture for UK marriages has been one of decline, from a peak of 480,285 marriages in 1972, with 2010 showing the first increase since 2004.

In Scotland the number of marriages increased, from 28,480 in 2010 to 29,135 in 2011, a rise of 2.3%. Northern Ireland also recorded a rise in the number of marriages, increasing by 2.6% to 8,366 in 2011, from 8,156 in 2010.

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).

## 11 . Civil partnerships

The number of civil partnership formations in the UK increased in 2010 and 2011, following decreases between 2006 and 2009. In 2011, 6,795 civil partnerships were formed by same-sex couples compared with 6,385 in 2010 (an increase of 6.4%). 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 2011, is 53,417.

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).

## 12 . Availability of mid-2011 population estimates by marital status and the calculation of marriage rates for 2011

Mid-2011 population estimates by marital status are not currently scheduled for publication. These estimates would normally be used to calculate 2011 marriage rates.

Consequently, 2011 marriage rates are based on estimated 2011 marital status population estimates which 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 have shown that these estimates provide:

- a plausible marital status distribution for 2011
- a more plausible 2011 marital status distribution than the 2010 marital status estimates

ONS will consider the future need for population estimates by marital status in their present form once results from the 2011 Census by marital status, age and sex are available. These results will be used to benchmark current methods and evaluate alternative sources of data on partnership status.

## 13 . Users of marriage statistics

ONS uses marriage statistics to:

- report on social and demographic trends
- perform further analyses, for example determining [What percentage of marriage end in divorce?](#) 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 demography unit at the Department for Work and Pensions use marital status estimates, 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, 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, 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' 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 2011](#) are available on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website.

[ONS Marriages Metadata \(420.6 Kb Pdf\)](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages.

[ONS Marriages Quality and Methodology Information \(214.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) 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 partnerships 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. For information about 2011 estimates see section titled 'Availability of Mid-2011 Population Estimates by Marital Status and the Calculation of Marriage Rates for 2011'

[Population projections by marital status for England and Wales](#) are available on the ONS website. The latest figures are consistent with the 2008-based national principal population projection for England and Wales and cover the 25 years to 2033.

## 15. References

Beaujouan E and Bhrolcháin M (2011) [Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s \(283.5 Kb Pdf\)](#) , Population Trends 145.

Bradford Wilcox, W. (2011) [The State of our Unions. Marriage in America 2009](#), Money and Marriage, University of Virginia, The National Marriage Project.

ONS (2013) [What percentages of marriage end in divorce?](#)

Wilson B and Smallwood S (2008) [The proportion of marriages ending in divorce \(244.2 Kb Pdf\)](#), Population Trends 131.

Wilson B and Smallwood S (2007) [Understanding recent trends in marriage \(562.2 Kb Pdf\)](#), Population Trends 128.

## 16. Background notes

1. These figures relate only to marriages solemnised in England and Wales. Marriages of England and Wales residents that took 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 took place in England and Wales are included in the figures.
2. Figures for 2011 are rounded and provisional. Annual marriage statistics are finalised when the majority of returns have been received from register offices and the clergy. In 2010, the number of marriages in England and Wales increased by approximately 2,700 (1.1%) records between the provisional first release of figures and the finalised statistics. Further information can be found in the [ONS Marriages Metadata \(420.6 Kb Pdf\)](#).
3. Prior to 2011, marriage entries were collated by Registrars in the registration district where they occurred. The entries were then sent to the General Register Office (GRO) for the compilation of central records and indexes. Certified copies of each completed marriage entry appearing in the marriage register (both civil

and religious) were also sent to ONS by GRO on a regular basis. Once received, the forms were entered onto ONS systems and verified.

From January 2011, all marriages registered within England and Wales have been recorded on the web based Registration Online system (RON). Civil marriages are entered onto RON by registrars while religious marriages are collated by registrars before being sent to GRO where they are entered onto RON. Marriage data recorded on RON is then passed onto ONS for statistical purposes. Regular receipt and diagnostic tests are performed by ONS resulting in contact with GRO to resolve any issues identified.

4. 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. For information about 2011 estimates see section titled 'Availability of Mid-2011 Population Estimates by Marital Status and the Calculation of Marriage Rates for 2011'.
5. 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 thousand 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.
6. 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.

7. 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.
8. 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 was subject to immigration control and was marrying in England and Wales by superintendent registrar's certificate, notice had to be given in a designated register office and qualifying conditions had to be met. A person subject to immigration control needed a certificate of approval from the Home Office unless he or she had a marriage visa or settled status. The same legislation applied to Scotland and Northern Ireland but did 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 this 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.
9. Special extracts and tabulations of marriage data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreement of costs, where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to:

Vital Statistics Output Branch Life Events and Population Sources Division Office for National Statistics  
Segensworth Road Titchfield 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.

10. We welcome feedback from users on the content, format and relevance of this release. The Health and Life Events (HLED) User Engagement Strategy is available to download from the ONS website. Please send feedback to the postal or e-mail address above.
11. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

12. 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
- 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.