Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales, quality and methods guide

What the population estimates by marital status and living arrangements cover, how we produce them, and their quality and comparability. Includes definitions and latest, past and upcoming changes.

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1 . Overview

We produce annual estimates of the resident population by marital status and living arrangements by sex and age group for England and Wales. The estimates are calculated by applying legal marital status and living arrangement distributions from the household dataset of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales.

Like all survey-based estimates, these estimates could change if a different sample were selected.

The LFS does not cover those living in communal establishments such as care homes, prisons or military barracks. Therefore, there is a degree of undercoverage within the survey distributions, which are applied to the mid-year population estimates.

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for mid-2022 to mid-2024 have been revised using revised population estimates for England and Wales published on 29 July 2026.

These are accredited official statistics. For more information, see Quality of the statistics.

2 . Latest changes to quality and methods

We made minor updates to this guide on 31 July 2026. We made no important changes to quality and methods.

For more information on past and upcoming changes, go to Changes and their effects on comparability over time.

3 . What the statistics cover

We present statistics on population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for the resident population in England and Wales in:

- our Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for England and Wales dataset
- our Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for England dataset
- our Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for Wales dataset

Estimates are provided by sex and age group where possible. The England and Wales combined dataset provides more detailed age groups than the datasets for the individual countries. Different age groups are used in the marital status and the living arrangements tables to maximise the robustness of the estimates.

Marital status and living arrangement categories

The categories for different forms of legal marital status include:

- never married or civil partnered
- married
- civil partnered
- divorced, which includes those who have legally dissolved their civil partnership
- widowed, which includes those who are a surviving civil partner

The categories for different forms of living arrangements include:

- living in a couple – married or civil partnered
- living in a couple – cohabiting, never married or civil partnered
- living in a couple – cohabiting, previously married or civil partnered
- not living in a couple – never married or civil partnered
- not living in a couple – previously married or civil partnered

4 . Where the data come from

Labour Force Survey

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a quarterly social survey of the resident population in the UK. It covers people in private households, NHS accommodation, and students in halls of residence whose parents live in the UK. Such students are included through proxy interviews with their parents.

The main purpose of the survey is to provide information on the UK labour market, but it includes data on a variety of other variables, such as marital status and living arrangements. The survey does not cover the population who live in communal establishments such as prisons and nursing homes. Census data show that 1.7% of the population lived in communal establishments in England and Wales in 2021, representing a slight decrease from 1.8% in 2011.

LFS household datasets are produced on a quarterly basis each year (January to March, April to June, July to September and October to December). Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements use the April to June quarter each year as this includes the mid-year point (30 June).

Information on achieved sample sizes can be found in our LFS performance and quality monitoring reports and users may also want to refer to our LFS user guide.

Each quarter's LFS sample is made up of five waves. Each wave is interviewed in five successive quarters, so that in any one quarter, one wave will be receiving their first interview, one wave their second and so on, with one wave receiving their fifth and final interview. So, there is an 80% overlap in the samples for each successive quarter, and the samples for the sixth quarter and the first quarter have no common elements.

The LFS household dataset differs from the person-level dataset in the way that the weighting is applied to the sample. The household dataset ensures that the weight given to each member of the same household is the same. The person-level dataset, which is more commonly used for information on the labour market, includes only individual weights, which usually differ between members of the same household. The Labour Force Survey user guide: volume 8 recommends the use of the household dataset when analysing people by marital or cohabitation status.

Surveys, such as the LFS, provide estimates of population characteristics rather than exact measures. In principle, many random samples could be drawn from the population and each would give different results since each sample would be made up of different people who would give different answers to the questions asked on the LFS. The spread of these results is the sampling variability, which generally reduces with increasing sample size.

Confidence intervals can be used to present the sampling variability. A 95% confidence interval can be interpreted as the interval within which 95 times out of 100, the true value will lie if the sample were repeated 100 times. Pragmatically, if you assume the confidence interval contains the true mean, you will be wrong 5% of the time.

Sampling and non-sampling error, along with information on measuring error, can be found in our Labour Force Survey (LFS) quality and methodology information. More information can be found in our Labour Force Survey (LFS) performance and quality monitoring reports and Labour Force Survey (LFS) user guide.

Mid-year population estimates

The annual mid-year population estimates provide the number of people by single year of age and sex who are usually resident in England and Wales on 30 June of the reference year. We calculate and usually publish them annually around six to seven months after the end of the reference year. The data published each year refer to the previous mid-year. They are the official population estimates for England and Wales.

More information about the quality and methodology of the mid-year population estimates is available.

5 . How we produce the statistics

Weighted population estimates by age group and sex are produced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for each year and geographical area. These estimates are broken down by legal marital status or living arrangement. The LFS is a survey of the UK, however, only estimates for England and Wales are used to produce our population estimates by marital status and living arrangements.

The LFS estimates are first converted into percentages for each age-sex group within each geographical area. Mid-year population estimates for each area and year are then grouped into the same age-sex groups. These mid-year population estimates by age group, sex and area are then multiplied by corresponding LFS percentages by marital status or living arrangement, to produce the final estimates. For each geographical area, totals for all persons by age and all persons are calculated by summing the relevant age and sex groups.

Estimates for England and Wales separately are not expected to sum to the estimate for England and Wales combined. This is because area-specific survey percentages that reflect each area's population structure are applied to the population estimates for each area. Because these structures differ, the separate country estimates will not necessarily add up to the combined total.

Estimates based on sample sizes of fewer than three are suppressed in published tables because of low reliability. However, the tables have been designed to minimise the need for suppression by combining age groups when necessary. Suppression may be needed for small groups of people, such as those in same-sex marriages in the early years following the introduction of legislation enabling same-sex couples to marry.

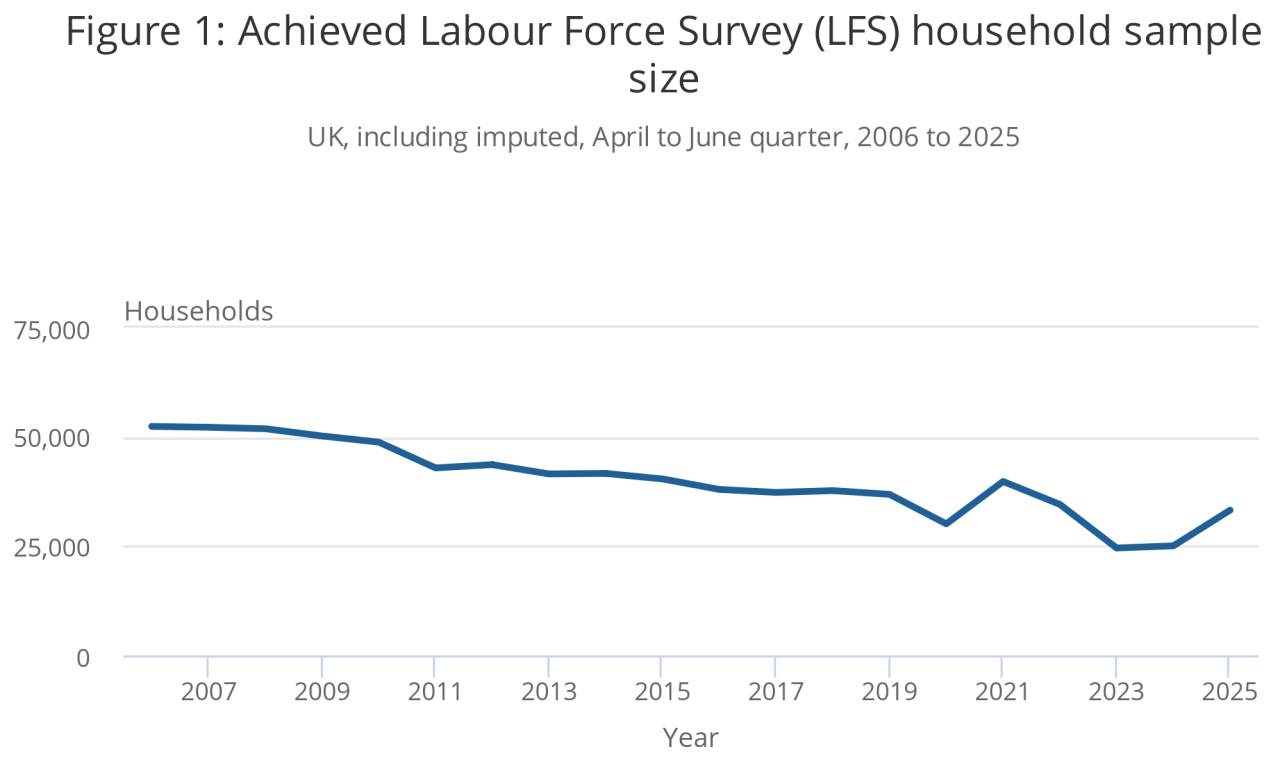
To show the accuracy of the population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, the estimates in the datasets are presented with confidence intervals and a coefficient of variation (CV). The CV indicates the robustness of each estimate and is calculated by dividing the estimate by the standard error.

The confidence intervals and CVs are calculated to reflect the uncertainty of the survey element of statistics: the uncertainty from the population component has not been accounted for. Work around assessing this uncertainty is ongoing.

Response rates (a proportion of how many interviews were achieved as a proportion of those eligible for the survey) have declined in recent years. Low response rates or achieved sample sizes are an important factor in understanding uncertainty of these statistics. However, following implementation of the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan, achieved sample sizes are improving. For more information, see our Labour Force Survey performance and quality monitoring reports.

Figure 1: Achieved Labour Force Survey (LFS) household sample size

UK, including imputed, April to June quarter, 2006 to 2025



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Statistical significance within the statistical bulletin has been determined using the 95% confidence intervals, where instances of non-overlapping confidence intervals between estimates indicate that the difference is unlikely to have arisen from random fluctuation.

In cases of overlapping confidence intervals between estimates, further testing is undertaken to determine if the confidence interval for the difference between the two estimates crosses zero. If it does, this confirms that there is no statistical significance. If it does not cross zero, then this indicates statistical significance.

In our bulletin, we compare the latest estimates and/or percentages against earlier points in time and between different groups. Such comparisons arestatistically significant, unless we have stated otherwise.

For more information on statistical significance see ourUncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys methodology.

If population weights for the LFS or the mid-year population estimates are revised to reflect improvements to methods or data, then we also revise our population estimates by marital status and living arrangements.

6 . Quality of the statistics

Statistical designation

The Office for Statistics Regulation independently reviewed these accredited official statistics in March 2017. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value inthe Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled “accredited official statistics”.

How we quality assure the data and statistics

1. Social Survey Division carries out validation checks as part of the production of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) dataset.

2. We carry out validation checks when we receive the dataset and apply edit rules:

- lone parents do not have a partner in the household
- no one aged under 18 years is married or living in a couple; this has been updated to reflect the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 changing from 16 years to 18 years from 27 February 2023
- nobody is in a civil partnership before 2005
- children are not heads of families

3. If our validation checks fail, these cases are referred to the Social Surveys Division within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for validation and correction.

4. Visual quality assurance is also carried out on the data; this includes checking that:

- marital status distributions are plausible by age
- there are no large year-on-year changes
- totals sum to the annual mid-year population estimates

Strengths and limitations

Strengths

- These data provide users with valuable insight into the changing patterns of marriage, civil partnership and cohabitation back to 2002.
- The mid-year population estimates are produced using a well-established demographic approach; the data sources used are the best that are available on a nationally consistent basis.
- The survey estimates are taken from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which provides survey estimates used for labour market, economic statistics and family and household statistics.
- The use of household survey estimates means that the marital status statistics are adaptive to changes in legislation relating to legal marital status (for example, the introduction of civil partnerships and same-sex marriages); however, small sample sizes may mean that it takes a number of years before it is possible to produce robust estimates at lower geographies or by other demographic characteristics such as age.
- Confidence intervals and an indication of the size of the coefficient of variation are presented around the survey component of the estimates to give users an indication of the reliability of the estimates.

Limitations

- The LFS does not include the 1.7% of the population living in communal establishments such as prisons and nursing homes; these residents have different marital status distributions from those in private households, which are not taken into account.

- Estimates from 2002 onwards, published since July 2015, use a new methodology so are not directly comparable with earlier estimates published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS); for more detail see Changes and their effects on comparability over time.

- Population estimates by marital status are available for England and Wales only; no comparable figures are available for Northern Ireland, and the latest estimates available for Scotland are for mid-2008.

- International comparisons of marital status are not straightforward for a variety of reasons, including differences in the legal marital statuses available to residents, the age structure of the population affecting the proportion within each legal marital status, and differences in the way the data are collected and presented.

- Although measures of uncertainty are provided, they only relate to the survey component and do not currently account for uncertainty surrounding the mid-year population estimates.

European Statistical System quality dimensions

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has developed Guidelines for measuring statistical quality based on the five European Statistical System (ESS) quality dimensions. These are:

- relevance
- accuracy and reliability
- timeliness and punctuality
- comparability and coherence
- accessibility and clarity

We have integrated these considerations into the guide.

7 . Changes and their effects on comparability over time

Over the years, we have changed how we produce population estimates by marital status and living arrangements. Sometimes this is to improve the statistics, and sometimes it is because of external changes (such as changes to policy, or changes to legal definitions).

Changes can sometimes affect comparability of the statistics over time.

Latest changes

We made minor updates to this guide on 31 July 2026. We made no important changes to quality and methods.

We have made small changes to the age groups in our datasets for the 2025 data year onwards. This is to reflect a change in the law in February 2023, which raised the minimum age for marriage and civil partnership from 16 to 18 years. The 2025 data is the first year in which no one under 18 years of age can be married.

Past changes

These changes are ordered by date, with the most recent first.

Change in legislation

The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 received Royal Assent in April 2022 and came into effect on 27 February 2023. From this date, the minimum age of marriage and civil partnership in England and Wales is 18 years.

Our estimates and quality assurance processes were updated to reflect this change.

Marital status definitions

Further to provisions set out in the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and the Civil Partnership (Opposite-sex Couples) Regulations 2019, opposite-sex couples in England and Wales became eligible to form a civil partnership from 31 December 2019. Opposite-sex civil partners are included in the estimates of the population in civil partnerships for years ending mid-2020 onwards. Separate estimates for same-sex and opposite-sex civil partnerships are not currently available because of very small sample sizes.

Geography

Since July 2017, separate estimates for England and Wales have been produced. The age bands presented for England and for Wales are slightly less detailed than those present for England and Wales combined. This ensures sample sizes are large enough to produce statistically reliable estimates. Figures can be compared by grouping the England and Wales combined age bands into the broader age bands used for the individual countries.

Measures of uncertainty

Confidence intervals and coefficients of variation were included from July 2016 onwards.

Method

Our current method was introduced in July 2015. As part of the release a consistent back series to 2002 was provided. The estimates from this method are not comparable with estimates produced using previous methodologies. For more information on the impact see Section 8 in our Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2014.

A detailed explanation of the previous methodology is provided in Population estimates by marital status: methodology (219.9Kb Pdf).

Upcoming changes

Reweighting following census rebase

Following the 2021 Census, the LFS household dataset will be reweighted back to 2012. Following this, we will revise our estimates accordingly.

Change in data source

As part of the work to transform the LFS, we are expecting to move to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) as our survey data source. We are working closely with the surveys team to assess its suitability and to ensure we can continue to produce reliable and comparable population estimates by marital status and living arrangements for England and Wales. We are also exploring the suitability of alternative data sources.

8 . Comparability and coherence with other statistics producers

There are no known statistical producers of population estimates by marital status and living arrangements within the UK.

For alternative population estimates of marital status and living arrangements, including lower levels of geography, please refer to Census 2021 analysis on legal partnership status and living arrangements.

9 . Users and uses of these statistics

A range of organisations and government departments use our population estimates by marital status and living arrangements statistics to inform services and policies. For example, the estimates:

- are used for forecasting around pensions and National Insurance funds
- are used as denominators in the calculation of rates, for example, the rate of births within marriage
- have a number of uses, both direct and indirect, informing policy decisions at a national level

Other users include academics, researchers, charities and the media.

10 . Definitions

Marital status

A person's legal marital status:

- married
- civil partnered
- widowed (including surviving civil partner)
- divorced (including those who have been granted a dissolution of their civil partnership)
- never married or civil partnered

Separated couples are considered to be married or civil partnered (having not legally divorced or dissolved a civil partnership).

Living arrangement

Whether or not someone is living together as a couple within the same household.

11 . Related links

[Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2025]
Statistical bulletin | Released 31 July 2026
Annual estimates of population by legal marital status and cohabitation status by age and sex for England and Wales.

[Mid-year population estimates quality and methodology guide (QMG)]
Methodology | Released 29 July 2026
What the mid-year population estimates cover, how we produce them, and their quality and comparability. Includes definitions and latest, past and upcoming changes.

[Population estimates methodology guide for the mid-2012 to mid-2016 population estimates]
Methodology | Released 22 March 2018
Methods used in the revised mid-2012 to mid-2016 usual resident population estimates of England and Wales.

[Labour Force Survey user guidance]
Methodology | Updated 18 May 2026
Guidance about the background and methodology of the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

12 . Cite this page

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