2008-based Marital Status Population Projections

This document provides access to the results of the 2008-based population projections by marital status for England & Wales. The projections cover both legal marital status and (opposite-sex) cohabitation for the period to 2033, and were published on the 24 June 2010 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Information on methodology and assumptions used to produce the projections is also provided. Variant projections are also produced for both legal marital status and cohabitation to illustrate the sensitivity of these results to alternative levels of future marriage, divorce and cohabitation to that assumed in the principal projections.

Marital status population projections are produced periodically. The last sets were published in March 2009 and were based on data to 2006.

One of the main uses of these projections is as one of the inputs to the regular projections of the number and type of households in England¹, now produced by Communities and Local Government. Marital status projections are also used by the Department for Work and Pensions to cost various aspects of the future social security programme.

The statistical bulletin for the 2008-based marital status projections can be found here

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¹ www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/housingstatisticsby/householdestimates/
1 – Data tables

Principal projections

Legal marital status

• Summary results: Population by broad age group and legal marital status, 2008, 2011, 2021, 2031 and 2033 (linked here) (minor correction made on 8 October 2010)
• Males by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
• Females by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)

Cohabitation

• Summary results: Cohabiting population by broad age group and marital status, 2008, 2011, 2021, 2031 and 2033 (linked here)
• Cohabiting males by five year age group and marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
• Cohabiting females by five year age group and marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)

Partnership - summarising legal marital status and cohabitation

• Summary results: Population by broad age group and partnership status, 2008, 2011, 2021, 2031 and 2033 (linked here)

Variant projections

Summary tables

• Comparison of marriage and divorce variants, 2011, 2021 and 2031 (linked here)
• Comparison of cohabitation variants, 2008, 2011, 2021 and 2031 (linked here)

Legal marital status

High marriage variant:

• Summary results: Population by broad age group and legal marital status, 2008, 2011, 2021, 2031 and 2033 (linked here) (minor correction made on 8 October 2010)
• Males by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
• Females by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
Marital status population projections, 2008-based

Low marriage variant:
- Males by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
- Females by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)

High divorce variant:
- Males by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
- Females by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)

Low divorce variant:
- Males by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
- Females by five year age group and legal marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)

Cohabitation

High cohabitation variant:
- Summary results: Cohabiting population by broad age group and marital status, 2008, 2011, 2021, 2031 and 2033 (linked here)
- Cohabiting males by five year age group and marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
- Cohabiting females by five year age group and marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)

Low cohabitation variant:
- Summary results: Cohabiting population by broad age group and marital status, 2008, 2011, 2021, 2031 and 2033 (linked here)
- Cohabiting males by five year age group and marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
- Cohabiting females by five year age group and marital status, 2008 to 2033 (linked here)
2 – Base population

Legal marital status
The population base for the legal marital status projections uses the ONS marital status estimates series that include an adjustment for marriages of residents of England and Wales that take place abroad. The mid-2008 base year marital status estimates for this projection have been adjusted to be consistent by age and sex with the mid-2008 population base used in the latest national population projections, published October 2009. This projection base reflects indicative results of phase 1 of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme. The mid-2008 population estimates were subsequently revised on 13th May 2010 with the final changes from phase 1 of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme. These projections do not take account of these final phase 1 changes. Mid-2002 to mid-2008 marital status population estimates will be revised in winter 2010.

Cohabitation
The cohabitation projections are based on mid-2008 cohabitation estimates for England & Wales. The methodology used to produce these estimates is the same as that used for the mid-2007 cohabitation estimates. These estimates are consistent with the legal marital status estimates, published November 2009, rather than the adjusted base estimates as used for the legal marital status projections described above. However, the difference between the estimates used and those recalculated using the adjusted base discussed above is very small. The cohabitation estimates and projections produced by ONS relate to opposite-sex co-residential cohabiting adults.

Population coverage
The population includes all persons who are usually resident in England & Wales, whatever their nationality. Members of HM armed forces based in England & Wales are included, but members of HM armed forces and their families who are based outside England & Wales are excluded. Foreign armed forces based in England & Wales are included, as are their dependants if they are accompanied.

2 www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15107
3 Methodology used to produce marital status estimates with an adjustment for marriages abroad can be found www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/Methodology-paper-marriages-abroad.pdf
4 Estimating the cohabiting population, Ben Wilson, Population Trends 136, Summer 2009
3 – Method of projection

Legal marital status
The legal marital status projections are produced using a component methodology that is based on assumptions of underlying marriage, remarriage and divorce rates. They have been produced using a multi-dimensional dynamic projection model using the software package LIPRO developed by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI). Further details of this package are available from the NIDI website.

The model requires assumptions to be made for all of the possible transitions between marital statuses. In addition, assumptions have to be made about the marital status distribution for both deaths and net migration.

With LIPRO, it is convenient to specify these assumptions as a function of an initial set of rates. For these projections, an initial set of marriage, divorce, new widow(er)’s and (marital status specific) mortality rates by single year of age and sex has been derived from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 components of change data used by ONS to update the population estimates by marital status. These initial rates were smoothed to remove any obvious peculiarities in age distributions.

The projections are adjusted within the LIPRO model to satisfy a number of consistency constraints. These include internal “two-sex” constraints (for example, that the number of men divorcing each year must equal the number of women divorcing) and the external constraint that the results of the legal marital status projection are fully consistent with the results of the 2008-based national (age and sex) principal population projection for England & Wales. Consistency constraints are discussed in more detail in section 4.

Cohabitation
Ideally, projections of de facto marital status (that is, cohabitation) would be produced by the same method as used for the legal marital status projections, that is, by a component methodology including transitions into and out of cohabitation within such a model. However, whereas detailed historical data on transitions between legal marital status categories are readily available from registration data, data on cohabitation formation and dissolution are very limited. Theoretically, estimates could be made from sample surveys; however, in practice, the data are not of sufficient quality for this

1 www.nidi.knaw.nl/en/research/projects/270101/
purpose. In particular, sample sizes are far too small to produce reliable data for individual ages.

As the model used for the legal marital status projections is a dynamic model, assumptions made about cohabitation transitions would affect the results for legal marital status. It would therefore be likely that the inclusion of necessarily speculative data on cohabitation transitions would actually reduce the quality of the legal marital status projections.

Instead, assumptions have been made about the proportions cohabiting in each age/sex/legal marital status group, and how these change over time (see section 7 for more detail about the cohabitation assumptions). The assumptions on proportions cohabiting have then been applied to the results of the legal marital status projections to produce projections of the cohabiting persons. The projections are then further subject to consistency constraints which are described in section 4.
4 – Consistency constraints

Legal marital status
Typically, a marital status population projection will be subject to a number of external and internal constraints. Within these constraints, the projections will be determined by assumptions of future (a) marriage and remarriage rates, (b) divorce rates, (c) mortality differentials by marital status and (d) net migration by marital status.

External constraints
The legal marital status projections were constrained to agree with the 2008-based national (age and sex) population projections for England & Wales (for information on the national population projections see here). There were three separate constraints:

(i) the number of people entering the “population at risk” each year is the projected population aged 15 last birthday from the national population projection, all of whom are assumed to be single (that is, never-married);

(ii) the total number of deaths each year is constrained to agree, at each age and sex, with the national population projection; and

(iii) the total number of net migrants each year is constrained to agree, at each age and sex, with the national population projection.

Satisfying all these constraints means that the total projected population for each future year, at each age and sex, is consistent with the national population projections.

Internal constraints
The input rates for marriage and divorce were subject to further adjustment in order to satisfy the following standard “two-sex” consistency requirements:

a) the number of males divorcing must equal the number of females divorcing;

b) the number of married males dying must equal the number of females becoming widowed; and

c) the number of married females dying must equal the number of males becoming widowed.

These three consistency conditions are handled in different ways within LIPRO. The divorce consistency requirement (a) is met by taking the mean of the initially projected, and unequal, male and female events; this is termed an active constraint. The widowhood consistency requirements (b and c) are passive constraints. They are “mortality dominant” constraints where the number of people entering widowhood is

set equal to the calculated number of married deaths and no further adjustment is required.

In previous marital status projections where no allowance was made for marriages abroad two further internal constraints were also applied:

d) the number of males marrying was assumed to equal the number of females marrying; and

e) net migration of married males was assumed to equal net migration of married females.

These constraints have not been applied for the 2008-based projections. This is a consequence of the allowance for marriages taking place abroad as there are more marriages abroad where a UK resident male marries a non-UK resident female than where a UK resident female marries a non-UK resident male. In such marriages, the non-resident partner should be identified as a migrant in ONS data sources when the couple returns to the UK. This creates genuine imbalances between numbers of males and females marrying abroad, and between net migration numbers for married males and females.

Another reason why net migration of married men and women is never exactly equal in practice is that one partner in a marriage may be temporarily resident abroad. Thus, the numbers of married men and women are never exactly equal in population estimates and have not been constrained to be equal in these projections. However, small adjustments have been made to the assumed marriage rates to ensure that the differential between the projected total numbers of married men and married women in the population remain plausible.

**Cohabitation**

As already discussed, because one partner in a marriage may be temporarily resident abroad, the numbers of married men and women are never exactly equal in population estimates, and they have not been constrained to be equal in the legal marital status projections. A similar argument could also apply to the cohabiting population but the available data do not allow an accurate estimate to be made of any imbalance. Therefore, both the base year population estimates and these projections have been constrained so that the total number of cohabiting males equals the total number of cohabiting females.
5 – Marriage rate assumptions

Principal assumptions
Assumptions about future marriage rates were based on trends observed during the period 2002 to 2007. Marriage rates were calculated to include an estimate for marriages of England and Wales’ residents taking place abroad. Estimates of such marriages are not available for years before 2002, but for mid-2002 to mid-2008 can be derived by differencing the two published marital status estimates series, with and without an allowance for marriages abroad7.

The approach for the projections was to extrapolate the time-series from the last six years using an exponentially smoothed model, with trends gradually assumed to diminish so that rates are held constant from 2018 onwards. Marriage data for 2008 were not available when these projections were prepared.

Recent trends show that for both males and females, first marriage rates have been falling at ages under 35, and have been relatively stable at ages 35 and over (figures 5.1 and 5.2). In general, remarriage rates for the divorced population have been declining at ages under 55, more rapidly for those aged under 40, but have been more stable at older ages (figures 5.3 and 5.4). Remarriage rates for the widowed population are relatively stable or falling very slightly at ages under 50, and increasing slightly at older ages. However, as remarriages involving a divorced person are over ten times as numerous as those involving a widowed person, remarriage rates for the widowed population are of much less significance for the projections.

It has been assumed that first marriage rates at ages under 35 will continue to fall, with rates at other ages remaining fairly stable. Remarriage rates for divorced men at ages under 55, and women at ages under 50, are assumed to continue to fall, with rates at other ages staying stable. Remarriage rates of widowed persons are assumed to remain at current levels except for women at ages 50-64 where rates are assumed to increase slightly.

In the past, marital status estimates have usually shown a small excess of married females over males. This has been explained by it being more likely that a husband would be working overseas with the wife remaining in the UK than vice versa.

7 www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15107
Estimates show that there are more male UK residents marrying abroad than females; that is, there are more marriages abroad where a UK resident male marries a non-UK resident female than where a UK resident female marries a non-UK resident male.

In the adjusted marital status estimates, the differential between estimates of total married men and women steadily reduces from a female excess of 60,000 in 2001 to zero in 2007, and in 2008 showed a male excess of 37,000.

There are two possible interpretations of this trend. It could be real, reflecting, for example, the marital status profile of recent accession country migrants, possibly with married males migrating to the UK alone with their wife remaining abroad. Alternatively, there could be a small gender bias towards married males either in the marriage abroad estimates or in the estimates of migrants by marital status (or the net effect of the two).

Whatever the explanation, we believe we should be cautious about extrapolating this apparent new trend forward. We have therefore adjusted the marriage rates by reducing the male rates and increasing the female rates so that the projections maintain roughly the current differential between married men and women indicated by the mid-2008 marital status estimates throughout the projection period.

**Variant assumptions**

The high and low marriage variants assume that marriage rates will gradually diverge from those assumed in the principal projection, so that from 2023 onwards first marriage rates differ by ±15 per cent and remarriage rates by ±10 per cent, at all ages, from those assumed in the principal projection. The greater margin of uncertainty assumed for first marriage reflects, at younger ages, the continuing decline in marriage rates and, at older ages, the uncertainty concerning how much of this decline will be offset by people marrying later in life.
Figure 5.1
Estimated and assumed first marriage rates, males, five year age groups, England & Wales

Figure 5.2
Estimated and assumed first marriage rates, females, five year age groups, England & Wales
Figure 5.3
Estimated and assumed remarriage rates, divorced males, five year age groups, England & Wales

Figure 5.4
Estimated and assumed remarriage rates, divorced females, five year age groups, England & Wales
Figure 5.5
Estimated and assumed remarriage rates, widowed males, five year age groups, England & Wales

Figure 5.6
Estimated and assumed remarriage rates, widowed females, five year age groups, England & Wales
6 – Divorce rate assumptions

Principal assumptions
Assumptions about future divorce rates were based on trends in the time-series during the period 2002 to 2008. The approach for the projections was to extrapolate the time-series from the last seven years using an exponentially smoothed model, with trends assumed to diminish gradually so that rates are held constant from 2018 onwards. An adjustment in the short term, in the first 4 years, is applied to the long term trend as provisional estimates of divorces for 2008-09 were available at the time that these projections were being produced.

There has been a long-term upward trend in divorce rates at most ages. However, since 2004, rates have been falling, quite sharply at young ages and more modestly at older ages (figures 6.1 and 6.2).

It has been assumed that divorce rates at ages under 45 will continue to fall, with the long-term assumption being well below the 2004 peak. For those aged 45 and over it has been assumed that rates will continue to rise, but only slightly, or remain at levels similar to those observed between 2004 and 2008.

Since the 2006-based marital status projections were produced divorce rates have continued to fall. Therefore the assumed long-term divorce rates in the 2008-based marital status projections are lower than in the 2006-based marital status projections.

Variant assumptions
The high and low divorce variants assume that divorce rates will gradually diverge from those assumed in the principal projection, so that from 2023 onwards, rates at all ages differ by ± 15 per cent from those assumed in the principal projection.
Figure 6.1
Estimated and assumed divorce rates, males, five year age groups, England & Wales, 1991 to 2023

Figure 6.2
Estimated and assumed divorce rates, females, five year age groups, England & Wales, 1991 to 2023
7 – Cohabitation assumptions

Past trends in cohabitation at ages 18 to 59

Unlike legal marital status, there are no regular official estimates of the cohabiting population of England & Wales. The best sources of data on trends in cohabitation are therefore from surveys such as the Annual Population Survey (APS), the General Household Survey (GHS) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Figures 7.1 and 7.2 show recent trends in the proportions of never-married and divorced adults aged 18 to 59 who are cohabiting as measured by these surveys. The APS is likely to provide the most reliable estimates of the three surveys by virtue of its larger sample size. The gaps in the GHS series in 1997 and 1999 are when the survey was not carried out.

Figure 7.1
Percentage of never-married population aged 18 to 59, who are cohabiting, England & Wales, 1991 to 2007

Figures 7.1 shows that for never-married adults aged 18 to 59, the long-term rise in cohabitation has levelled off over the last few years. For divorced adults in the same age group (figure 7.2), the proportions also remain stable with no evidence of change in recent years. For separated and widowed people, the numbers cohabiting are much smaller and it is very difficult to establish reliable trends from survey data.
Although overall cohabitation levels at ages 18 to 59 have recently been stable, there continue to be increases in the proportion of never-married adults cohabiting above ages 30 to 35, as shown in figures 7.3 and 7.4. These charts show estimated percentages of never-married males and females cohabiting in 2004 and 2007 by five year age group as estimated from the APS. It should be noted that the sample estimates become less reliable at older ages.
Cohabitation assumptions for the never-married population

The assumed future proportions cohabiting for the never-married population were calculated by extrapolating the proportions of adults that were cohabiting in mid-2008, by single year of age, derived from the new population estimates of the population cohabiting in England & Wales (see section 2). Fitting an appropriate age profile for future cohabitation has always been a difficult task in cohabitation projections, and despite the availability of APS data for recent years, there are limited reliable trend data on cohabitation by age from survey data.

These projections use the improved method for fitting appropriate age distributions introduced in the 2003-based projections. This method is derived from a cohort analysis of the proportions cohabiting in the never-married population from successive sets of ONS estimates of the cohabiting population. This analysis shows strong evidence that, from a given age, the proportion of never-married people cohabiting has remained almost constant as the particular cohort ages. In other words, beyond a certain age, the proportion of never-married people cohabiting aged $x$ in year $y$ is very similar to the proportion cohabiting aged $x + t$ in year $y + t$. This can be seen in figures 7.5 and 7.6, which show, by year of birth, the estimated percentage of the never-married population that was cohabiting in 1996, 2003 and 2008. So, for example, for
the 1951 cohort, the charts show the proportions cohabiting in 1996 (at age 45), in 2003 (at age 52) and in 2008 (at age 56).

**Figure 7.5**
*Percentage of never-married men cohabiting by year of birth, England & Wales, 1996, 2003 and 2008*

![Cohabitation graph for men](image)

**Figure 7.6**
*Percentage of never-married women cohabiting by year of birth, England & Wales, 1996, 2003 and 2008*

![Cohabitation graph for women](image)

The cohabitation age profile has therefore been fitted by assuming that proportions cohabiting will remain constant at ages under 35 for men and 33 for women, but at older ages will continue to follow these cohort trends. Based on the evidence (illustrated in figures 7.5 and 7.6), a slightly different age profile has been assumed for males and females.
Cohabitation assumptions for the previously-married population
For divorced, separated and widowed people, it has been assumed that proportions cohabiting will remain constant at each age.

Variant assumptions
The high and low cohabitation variants allow for some uncertainty in the base population by using initial proportions cohabiting in each age/sex/legal marital status group which differ from the initial proportions used for the principal projection by ± 2.5 per cent. Thereafter, the variants assume that the proportions cohabiting in each group will diverge further from the principal projection, so that from 2023 onwards they differ by ± 20 per cent for never-married individuals and by ± 10 per cent for others. The higher margin of uncertainty assumed for the former reflects the greater historical variation in the cohabitation time-series for the never-married population.
8 – Mortality assumptions

Mortality rates in England & Wales, as in other countries, are consistently lower for married people than for never-married (single) or previously-married individuals. This is usually attributed to a combination of protective and selective effects. For example, marriage may protect individuals by providing them with healthier lifestyles, but it may also be the case that healthy people are more likely to marry or remarry than those with health problems.

Figures 8.1 to 8.6 show mortality indices for 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008; they compare mortality rates for never-married, divorced and widowed people relative to those for the married population. A value of over 100 indicates that the mortality rate for that group was higher than the rate for married people of the same age, while a value of under 100 indicates that mortality was lower than for the equivalent married group. The charts show very stable differentials, especially for females, although differentials have widened slightly for widows. There was some trend toward worsening relative mortality for both never-married and divorced males during the 1990s but differentials have hardly changed between 2001 and 2008. It has therefore been assumed that current mortality differentials by marital status will remain constant throughout the projection period.

Although differentials are assumed to remain constant, the projections are subject to the overall constraint that all status mortality levels must be consistent with the 2008-based principal national population projection; thus mortality rates for each marital status are effectively assumed to fall in line with the decline assumed for overall mortality in the national projections.
Figure 8.1

Figure 8.2

Figure 8.3
Figure 8.4

Figure 8.5

Figure 8.6
9 – Migration assumptions

For net migration; the marital status distribution as used by ONS in the preparation of mid-year population estimates\(^8\) has been applied to the net migration assumption made in the principal national projections. Table 9.1 shows the long term net migration assumption from 2014-15 onwards.

Table 9.1
Summary of the assumed long-term net migration assumption from 2014-15 onwards, 2008-based marital status projections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Widow</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
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<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
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<td>0 – 15</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
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<td>16.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>20 – 24</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
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<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>30 – 34</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 44</td>
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<td>-1.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
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<td>45 and over</td>
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<td>-8.3</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>35 – 44</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<td>45 and over</td>
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<td>-5.6</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
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</table>

The assumptions are also consistent with the net migration assumptions, by age and sex, from the 2008-based national population projections. The national projections assume total net inward migration to England & Wales of +168,000 persons in 2008-09, increasing and then falling back to +168,000 persons in 2014-15 and each year thereafter. Migration is highly concentrated at young ages and so almost 90 per cent of net inward migration is assumed to be of never-married persons.

\(^8\) For details on this see marital status population estimate methodology documents www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/PEMethodology/