

Statistical bulletin

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2015

Population by legal marital status and cohabitation status by age and sex for England and Wales.



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1. Main points

There were 23.8 million people who were married in 2015. This was 50.6% of the population aged 16 and over.

The population aged 16 and over who were single increased from 29.6% in 2002 to 34.5% in 2015.

There were 28.4 million people living in a couple in 2015. This was 60.5% of the population aged 16 and over.

The population aged 16 and over who were “cohabiting, never married or civil partnered” increased from 6.8% in 2002 to 9.5% in 2015.

2. Statistician’s quote

“Just over half of the population aged 16 and over were married in 2015. This figure has steadily declined since 2002, which could be associated with a rise in cohabiting amongst those who have never married or formed a civil partnership.”

Pamela Cobb, Population Statistics Division, Office for National Statistics.

3. Things you need to know

Marital status indicates whether a person is legally married or not. This publication uses 5 categories of legal marital status:

- single, never married or civil partnered
- 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

Living arrangements indicate whether people are living with a partner or not, irrespective of their legal marital status.

Those aged under 16 are all considered to be single in line with the legal age of marriage in England and Wales. This bulletin focuses on the population aged 16 and over.

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

4. Married people are the largest group in the population aged 16 and over

The majority (50.6%) of the population aged 16 and over in 2015 were married. The next largest group within the population were single, never married or civil partnered (34.5%). The population who were divorced or widowed made up a smaller proportion of the total population at 8.1% and 6.5% respectively. The smallest group within the population were those who were civil partnered, making up 0.2% of the population aged 16 and over in 2015.

Table 1: Marital status (aged 16 and over), 2015

England and Wales

	Single ¹	Married	Civil partnered	Divorced	Widowed
Total number	16,197,748	23,750,695	96,180	3,817,912	3,062,475
Percentage of population aged 16 and over	34.5%	50.6%	0.2%	8.1%	6.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics

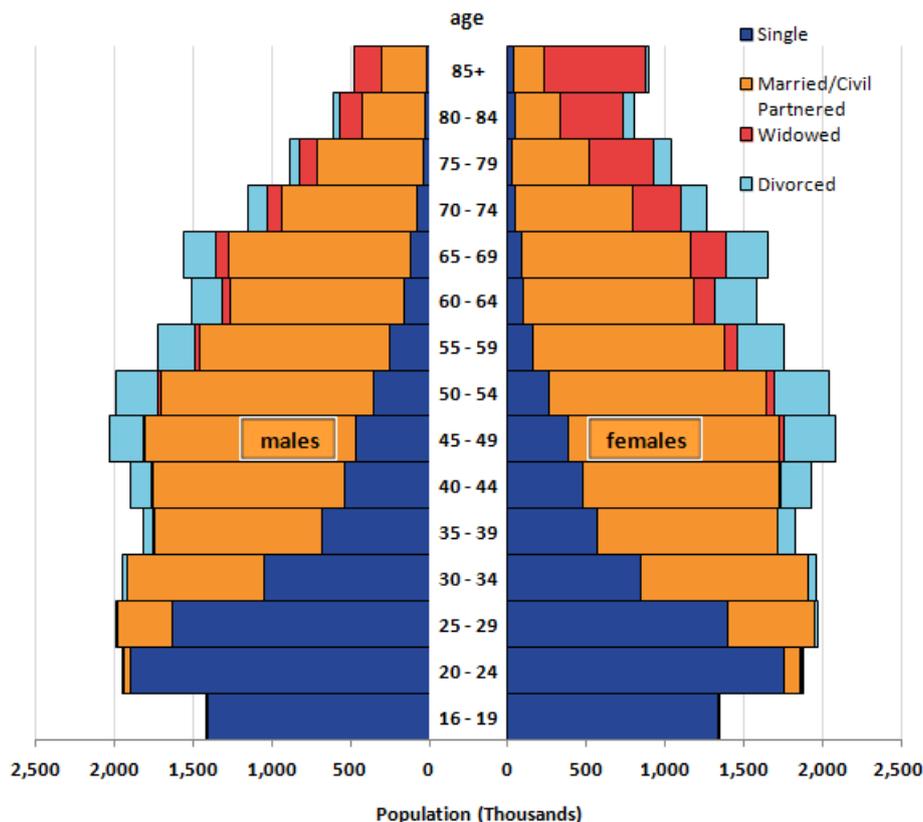
Notes:

1. See the 'Things you need to know' section for details about each marital status category.

In 2015, the number of people aged 16 and over in a same sex marriage was 26,023 – 0.1% of the married population – in England and Wales. Males accounted for 51% (13,150) of the population in a same sex marriage and females the remaining 49% (12,872).

Figure 1: Population Estimates (aged 16 and over) by marital status, age group and sex, 2015

England and Wales



The female population who are divorced was larger than the male divorced population in 2015. This could be associated with the remarriage rates (number marrying per 1,000 widowed or divorced population) seen for males and females ([Marriages in England and Wales: 2013](#)). In 2013 the remarriage rate for men was 25.3 per 1,000 and for women 12.2 per 1,000 suggesting more men tend to re-marry compared with women. Women may choose to remain partnerless or cohabit rather than remarry.

In 2015, the difference in the number of widowed males and females, especially at older ages, could be explained by women having higher life expectancy than men, and women traditionally marrying an older spouse ([National Life Tables, United Kingdom: 2012-2014](#)).

In 2015, 51.7% of men and 49.6% of women aged 16 and over were married. Being married was the most common marital status for women aged between 30 to 34 and 80 to 84 in 2015. For men, being married was the most common marital status after age 30 to 34. A marital status of single, never married was most common for those aged under 30.

5. Living in a couple is the most popular living arrangement for those aged 16 and over

The majority (60.5%) of the population aged over 16 were living in a couple in 2015. Those who were living in a couple were most likely to be married or civil partnered.

The remainder of the population aged 16 and over in 2015 were not living in a couple (39.5%). Those who were not living in a couple were most likely to be single, never married or civil partnered.

Table 2: Living arrangements (aged 16 and over), 2015

England and Wales

	Living in a couple			Not living in a couple	
	Married or civil partnered	Cohabiting - never married or civil partnered	Cohabiting- previously married or civil partnered	Never married or civil partnered	Previously married or civil partnered ¹
Total number	22,585,950	4,472,288	1,314,889	11,718,395	6,833,488
Percentage of population aged 16 and over	48.1%	9.5%	2.8%	25.0%	14.6%

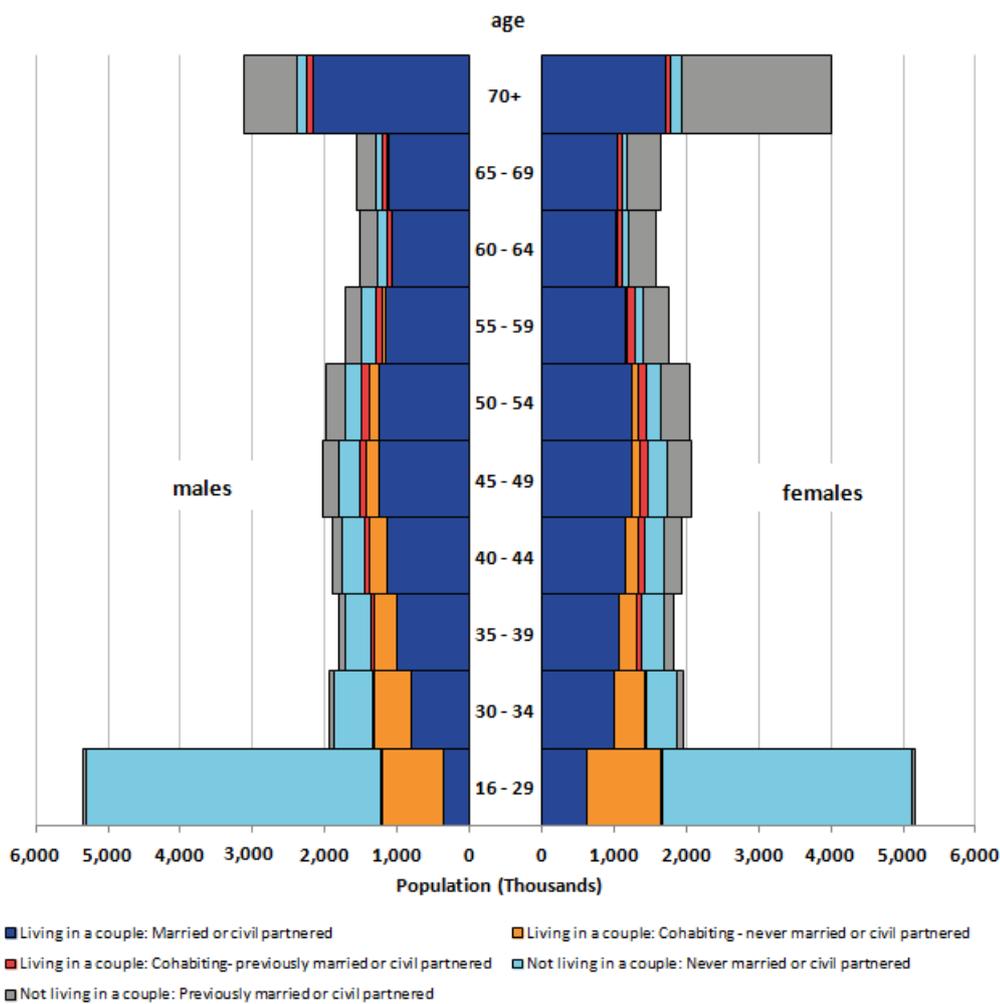
Source: Office for National Statistics

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 this category.

Figure 2: Population estimates (aged 16 and over) by living arrangements, age group and sex, 2015

England and Wales



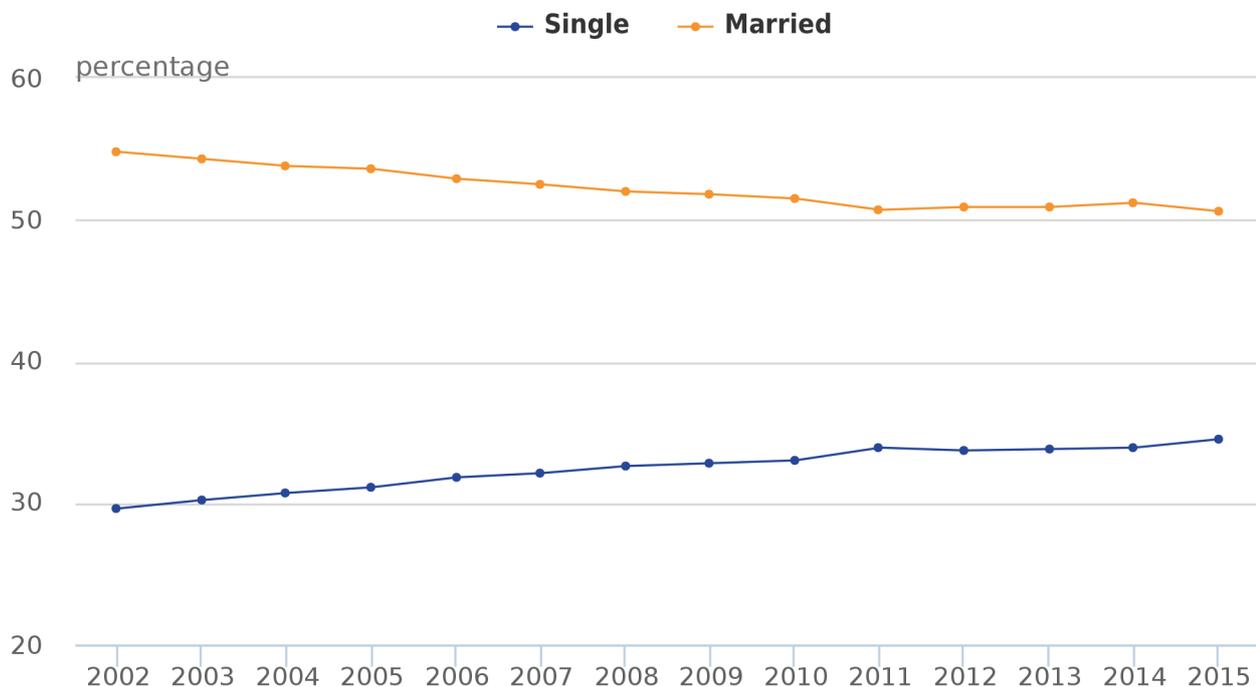
At ages 16 to 29 the majority of males and females were 'Not living in a couple: Never married or civil partnered', 76.5% and 66.6% respectively. They were likely to be living with their parents but could have been in relationships outside of the household ([Families and Households: 2015](#)). In 2015 there was a difference between males (15.9%) and females (20.1%) aged 16 to 29 who were "living in a couple: cohabiting – never married or civil partnered". This could be associated with women choosing to live with partners older than themselves.

In 2015 the biggest difference between males and females can be seen in the "not living in a couple" category where a larger percentage of women, especially at the oldest ages, were "not living in a couple: previously married or civil partnered". This is likely to be due to the larger number of women who were divorced or widowed compared with men.

6. The percentage of the population who are married has declined while the percentage who are single has increased

Figure 3: Percentages of people (aged 16 and over) by selected marital status, 2002 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

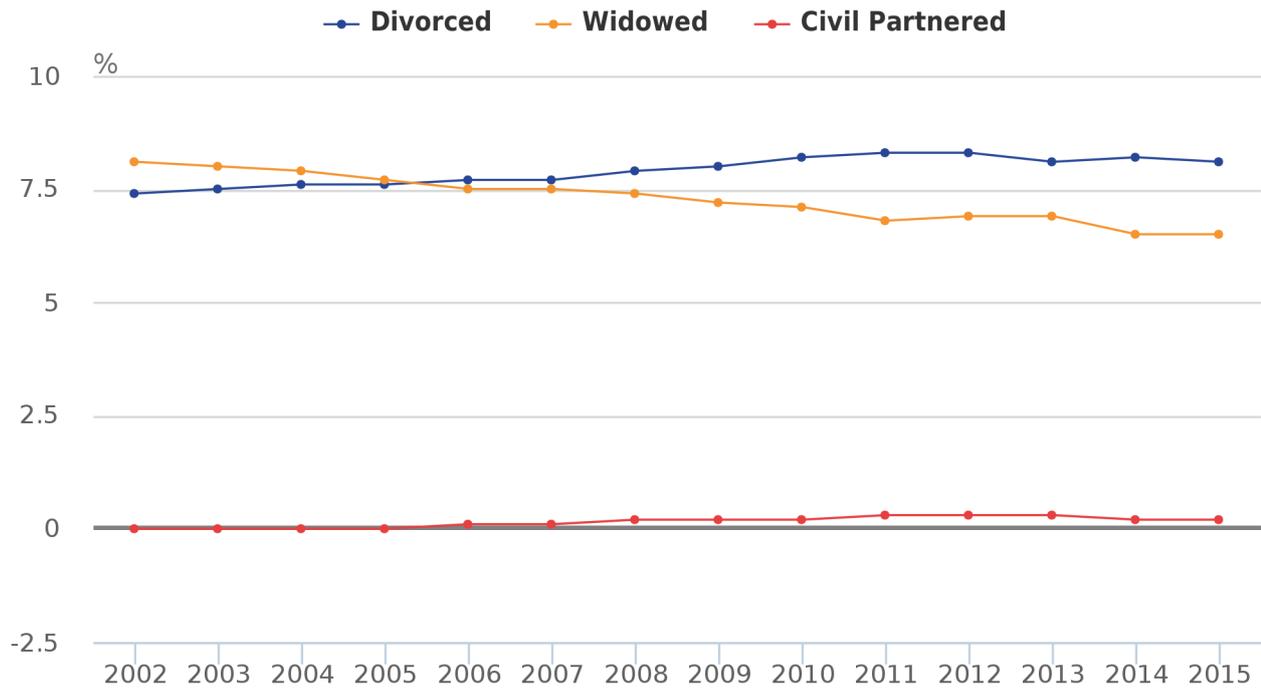
Notes:

1. Data in figures 3 and 4 have been plotted separately so that trends in the data can be clearly seen.

The percentage of people aged 16 and over who are married has decreased over time from 54.8% in 2002 to 50.6% in 2015. The percentage of people aged 16 and over who are single has increased over time from 29.6% in 2002 to 34.5% in 2015. This coincides with an increase in people cohabiting who are never married or civil partnered (Figure 5), as cohabitation has become more common as an alternative to marriage, especially at younger ages. The rise in single population also reflects more people in middle age groups remaining unmarried.

Figure 4: Percentages of people (aged 16 and over) by selected marital status, 2002 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

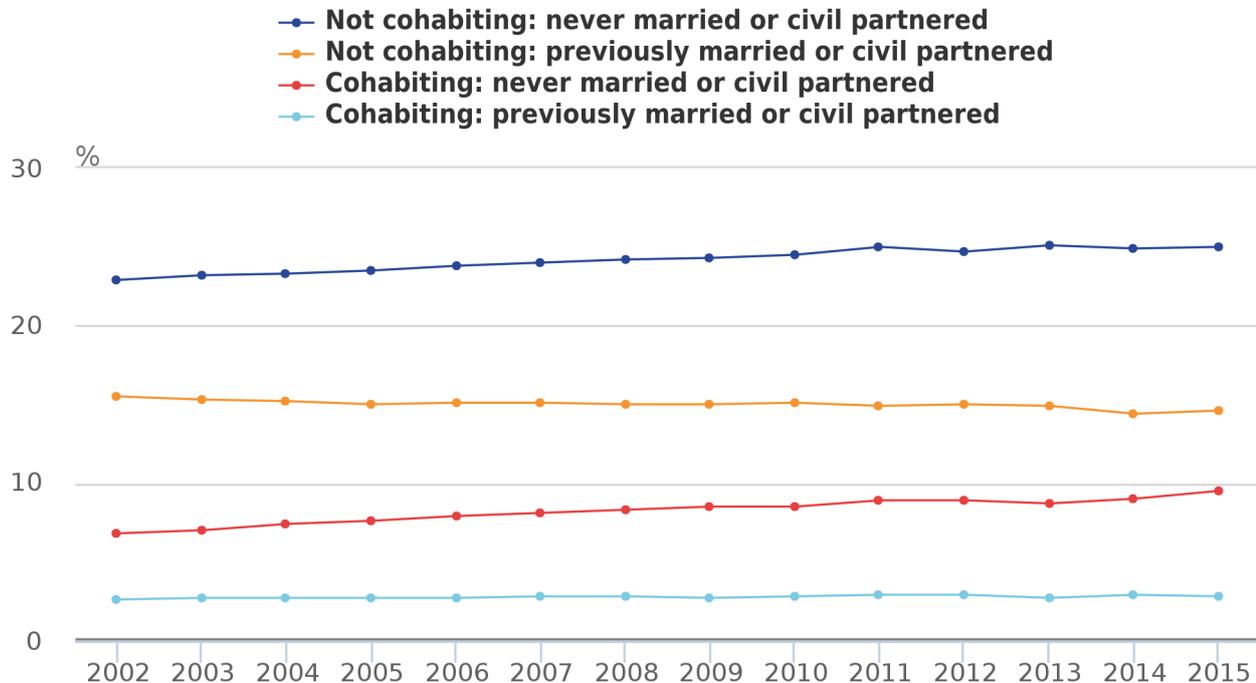
1. Data in figures 3 and 4 have been plotted separately so that trends in the data can be clearly seen.

The percentage of the population aged 16 and over who were divorced has increased steadily over time, this could be associated with the decrease in re-marriages over time ([Marriages in England and Wales: 2013](#)). In 2015, the percentage of the population aged 16 and over who were widowed was 6.5%; this fell from 8.1% in 2002. The fall could be associated with continuing increases in life expectancy, particularly for men, meaning fewer women are widowed. In addition, if the married population are living longer than before, they may divorce rather than become widowed.

7. The population who are single, never married or civil partnered are increasingly cohabiting

Figure 5: Percentages of people (aged 16 and over) by living arrangements (excluding 'living in a couple: married or civil partnered'), 2002 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. People who are 'living in a couple: married or civil partnered' have not been included in the graph for presentation reasons, so that trends in the smaller categories can be seen more clearly.
2. 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 'not living in a couple: previously married or civil partnered' category.

In 2002 people who were “cohabiting: never married or civil partnered” represented 6.8% of the population; this had increased to 9.5% by 2015. This may be explained by an increasing trend to cohabit instead of marry, or to cohabit before marriage, particularly at younger ages. [According to Families and Households: 2015](#), cohabiting couple families are the fastest growing family type in the UK (2004 to 2015).

In 2002, people who were “not cohabiting: never married or civil partnered” represented 22.9% of the population. By 2015 this had increased to around a quarter of the population at 25.0%. This could be explained by younger people delaying entering cohabiting relationships or delaying leaving the family home ([Families and Households: 2015](#)).

8. Links to ONS-related statistics

For more detailed statistics see our datasets:

- [Backseries: Population Estimates by Marital Status, selected years from Mid-1971 to Mid-2001: Single year of age and sex for England and Wales](#)
- [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#)

Further information on:

- the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#)
- the [Annual Mid-Year Population Estimates](#)

For the latest data on:

- marriages see [Marriages in England and Wales: 2013](#)
- same-sex marriages see [How have marriages of same sex couples affected the number of civil partnership formations?](#)
- divorces see [Divorces in England and Wales: 2013](#)
- civil partnerships see [Civil Partnerships in England and Wales: 2014](#)

9. What has changed within this publication?

1. [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 is the first time we are able to provide 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.
2. Improvements have been made to the estimates by providing indicators of quality. 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).

Confidence intervals provide an estimated range of values in which an actual data value is likely to fall 95% of the time. The coefficient of variation (CV) indicates the robustness of each estimate.

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.

10. Quality and Methodology

1. We previously published population estimates by marital status from 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 the bulletin [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements: England and Wales, 2002 to 2014](#) and within a [dataset](#) alongside the release.

The [Quality and Methodology Information document \(QMI\)](#) and the [Details and results of the internal review leading to changes in the methodology of Population Estimates by Marital Status](#) document provide more detail on the new methodology.

2. The population estimates by marital status and living arrangements can be used in the production of marriage and divorce rates and also in the estimation of pension liabilities by insurance and pension firms.

3. The population estimates by marital status and living arrangements [Quality and Methodology Information document](#) contains important information on:
 - strengths and limitations of the data
 - the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data, how it compares with related data
 - uses and users
 - how the output was created

4. 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.

5. We have considered producing the population estimates by marital status and living arrangements separately for England and for Wales. We are continuing to work on a methodology which produces estimates which are robust, reliable and useful for our users.
6. Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements refer to the mid-year (30 June). This is because the population estimates by marital status and living arrangements are based on the April to June quarter of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which includes the mid-year point and they are constrained to the mid-year population estimates.
7. The [revisions policy](#) for population statistics is available on our website.