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## Marital Status Estimates: strengths and limitations

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides information about the quality of the marital status population estimates for Scotland and their strengths and limitations. A summary of this information is available in the [About this Publication](#) paper which goes with this release. Information about the methods used to produce Marital Status Population Estimates for Scotland can be found in the [Methodology](#) paper. Both are available on the National Records of Scotland (NRS) formerly General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) website.
- 1.2 Population estimates by legal marital status provide estimates of the resident population who are single, married, widowed and divorced. They are published by sex and single year of age at Scotland level only. Population estimates by marital status are used for producing marriage and divorce rates, as inputs to equalities frameworks, and for analysis of household composition for use in policy planning and other research (e.g. analysis of breast feeding trends). They are also used by the Department for Work and Pensions for forecasting future pensions spending. This report provides users with information on the usability and fitness for purpose of these statistics.

## 2. Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs for both coverage and content.

- 2.1 The estimates refer to the mid-year (30 June) usually resident population, and are available for Scotland by sex and single year of age or age-group. Population estimates by marital status refer to legal marital status; whether an adult is single, married, widowed or divorced. Those aged under 16 years old are assumed to be single. In terms of legal status, separated couples are considered to be married, and cohabiting couples retain their legal marital status whether that is single, married, widowed or divorced. The current method takes no account for marriages and divorces of Scottish residents that take place outside Scotland.
- 2.2 The estimates describe the usually resident population, which includes all people who usually live in Scotland, regardless of their nationality. A full discussion of those included in the usually resident population can be found in the [Mid-year Estimate Methodology guide](#) on the NRS/GROS website.
- 2.3 Marital status estimates for geographies lower than Scotland level are not produced because marriage and divorce data are not available by area of residence. Marriage registrations are collected by registration district, however the fact that a marriage has taken place in a particular district does not mean that one or both parties are resident there e.g. marriages of those at Gretna Green. A similar issue exists for divorce data, which are collected by divorce court, but neither includes nor implies information on residence.
- 2.4 Population estimates by marital status have a number of uses as described in [section 1.2](#).

### 3. Accuracy

The closeness between an estimated result and the (unknown) true value.

- 3.1 Statistics on marriages, births and deaths registered in Scotland are collected through administrative sources, maintained by National Records of Scotland (NRS) (formerly the General Register Office for Scotland). Information on divorces is supplied to NRS by the Scottish Court Service. These data are considered very reliable for two reasons. Firstly, there is a legal requirement to register a marriage, divorce, birth or death and the certificate issued upon registration is needed and used by the recipient. Secondly, administrative data do not suffer from sampling error in the way that survey data do.
- 3.2 Marriages that take place in Scotland where both people are non-residents are excluded from the marital status estimates. However, no adjustment is made to the marriage registration data to account for Scottish residents who get married outside Scotland. Similar estimates for England and Wales, produced by the Office for National Statistics, do include an adjustment for these cases. A similar adjustment cannot be determined for the Scottish marital status estimates because the sample size from the International Passenger Survey (the source of international migration estimates) is not large enough to give reliable estimates at this level for Scotland. The research carried out by the Office for National Statistics cannot be scaled down and applied to Scotland because a much larger proportion of the marriages taking place in Scotland involve non-residents, compared with England and Wales. (Gretna Green is the main location of these 'tourist marriages'.) Therefore, the number of married people in Scotland will be underestimated due to the lack of data on marriages abroad, and the number of single, widowed and divorced people will be overestimated. It is not possible to quantify these underestimates and overestimates currently as information on the number of marriages abroad is not recorded.
- 3.3 Those who have formed, or formed and dissolved, a civil partnership are classified according to their marital status prior to forming that civil partnership because we do not have census data at present for Scotland to allow the separate estimation of these categories. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into effect in December 2005 and there were a total of 2,344 registered up to the end of 2008. There will also have been a number of changes to the population in civil partnerships due to migration, dissolutions and deaths in this period. But because of the small numbers involved, the effect of the exclusion of the civil partnership data from the marital status estimates is minor. There will be overestimates, totalling somewhere in the region of 2,000 to 3,000, in the published mid-2008 population estimates of single, widowed and divorced people.
- 3.4 The marital status of migrants to Scotland are estimated based on proportions from the 2001 Census.
- 3.5 Census estimates of the resident population by marital status are rolled forward to provide updated estimates in subsequent years. The population estimates by marital status are constrained to the NRS mid-year population estimates for Scotland by single year of age and sex. Population estimates are produced using a well established demographic approach called the cohort component method. This involves combining information from a number of data sources including the previous Census, survey data and administrative registers. The data sources used are the best that are available on a nationally consistent basis down to local authority level, however the estimates are subject to the coverage and error

associated with these sources. Further information on the quality of the mid-year population estimates, including an explanation of the cohort component method can be found in the mid-year population estimates publications themselves and in the methodology paper mentioned above.

#### **4. Timeliness and Punctuality**

Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the time lag between the actual and planned dates of publication.

- 4.1 Population estimates by marital status for Scotland have previously been published annually in the autumn. For a particular mid-year (30 June) they tend to become available around 12 months after the reference date. This time lag reflects the availability of the data sources which measure the components of population and marital status change over the year preceding the estimate, and the time required to process the data and calculate the estimates. The time lag to publication of these estimates also reflects their priority in relation to other statistics.
- 4.2 The publication date for population estimates by marital status is determined by the availability of the mid-year population estimates, registration data for marriages, divorces, births and deaths for the relevant time period. In the year following the release of Census estimates, the population estimates by marital status are published later than the usual release date. All forthcoming releases are pre-announced through the Future releases page on our website, the Scottish Government Forthcoming Releases spreadsheet and on the National Statistics Publication Hub. In the unlikely event of a change to the release schedule public attention will be drawn to any change in the pre-announced release date and a reason for the change will be explained, as set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.
- 4.3 Marital Status Estimates for mid-2009 have not been produced as other publications took priority. Since then we have consulted on our Demography Statistics Work Programme for the next few years and we will be publishing our Statistics Plan later this year (2011). Depending on the outcome of this review the marital status estimates may be continued and they may be revised back to 2001 after the 2011 Census results are available.

#### **5. Accessibility and Clarity**

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format(s) in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

- 5.1 Population estimates by marital status by single year of age and sex are available online from 2001 onwards. Estimates for earlier years are available on request by contacting us using our Contact Form or via e-mail at: [customer@gro-scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:customer@gro-scotland.gsi.gov.uk).
- 5.2 Links from the National Statistics Publication Hub Homepage, the Scottish Government website and our website make the release date and location of each new set of estimates clear. The estimates can be downloaded free of charge in Microsoft Excel format and are available on the NRS website. A methodology paper is also available.

- 5.3 It is the policy of National Records of Scotland to make its website and products accessible according to published guidelines. More information is available within the [Accessibility](#) section of the NRS/GROS website.

## 6. Comparability

The degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

- 6.1 The population estimates by marital status are consistent from mid-2001. Each annual set of population estimates by marital status is derived using the same methodological approach and the best data sources available.
- 6.2 NRS publish population estimates by marital status for Scotland. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish equivalent estimates for England and Wales which include an adjustment for marriages taking place abroad and therefore not directly comparable.  
The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) do not produce population estimates by marital status and therefore comparable estimates for the UK as a whole cannot be produced.
- 6.3 Time-series comparisons from 2001 to 2008 for Scotland are appropriate.

## 7. Coherence

The degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but which refer to the same phenomenon, are similar.

- 7.1 The population estimates by marital status are derived from, and constrained to, the mid-year population estimates and are therefore consistent. Mid-year population estimates are used both within and outside Government as the definitive set of population figures for the UK, constituent countries and sub-national geographies to local authority level. They are used for calculating other official population statistics, such as population projections, small area population estimates, household population estimates and estimates of the very elderly, as well as population estimates by marital status. Population estimates by marital status are consistent with all these outputs at Scotland level.
- 7.2 The Census in Scotland gathers data on the total population including information on marital status, age, sex and location of residence. The annual population estimates by marital status provide updated estimates of the population of Scotland by marital status for the period in between Censuses. The population estimates by marital status for mid-2001 are consistent with the mid-2001 population estimates, but differ from the 2001 Census. Further information on how the mid-2001 estimates differ from the 2001 Census can be found in the [2001 Populations](#) section on the NRS/GROS website.
- 7.3 Any improvements made to the mid-year population estimates as a result of current work by ONS and NRS to improve population and migration statistics using alternative sources of data will also be applied to the population estimates by marital status in due course.