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Coverage

United Kingdom

Theme

Population and Migration

Marriage rate returns to long-term trend

Population Trends 128 - Summer 2007

Changes in marriage legislation in 2005 contributed to but do not wholly explain the lowest ever marriage rates in England and Wales, according to a new analysis of marriage trends published today by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Following an increase in marriage in the years 2002 to 2004, the 2005 marriage rate was the lowest on record. Apart from occasional years, marriage rates had previously been falling since 1973. The 2005 figures appear to be a return to the longer term trend.

The study, published today in the Summer issue of *Population Trends**, suggests there is some evidence that changes to marriage laws, for nationals of countries outside the European Economic Area (non-EEA) subject to immigration control, may have affected recent marriage behaviour. However, the analysis shows it is unlikely to be the only reason for the overall recent fall in marriage numbers, with delay in marriage and more cohabitation continuing to be factors underlying the long term trend.

Population Trends 128 contains new and up-to-date statistics and feature articles on population and demographic topics.

The feature articles cover:

- The accuracy of the official UK population projections of the last fifty years.
- Some of the recent key trends in marriage.

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- An assessment of the potential for using administrative data sources in measuring the migration component of population change.

There are also two summary reports in this issue:

- Live births in England and Wales, 2006: area of residence.
- Death registrations in England and Wales, 2006: area of residence.

Key findings from the article ***Understanding recent trends in marriage*** include:

- In February 2005, legislation resulted in changes to the marriage laws for non-EEA nationals subject to immigration control. These changes may have had some effect on marriage trends, but the effect is not clear. Analysis of age specific trends and type of ceremony suggests recent marriage trends cannot be explained simply by changes in marriages involving non-EEA nationals.
- Provisional figures show the number of civil ceremonies in register offices in England and Wales dropped by 13 per cent between 2004 and 2005.
- Provisional figures show the number of marriages in London decreased by approximately 35 per cent between 2004 and 2005. The number of civil ceremonies in register offices in London decreased by approximately 39 per cent.
- In 2005, there was a clear difference between the monthly pattern of marriages in England and Wales and the monthly pattern for London. As London has the largest proportion of population born outside the EEA, it may be that any effect of the legislation change was greater in London.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. 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.
2. The European Economic Area (EEA) comprises the 27 countries of the European Union together with Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Switzerland is not an EEA member but for the purposes of marriage Swiss nationals are treated in the same way as EEA nationals.
3. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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