

# Census 2011: Marital status and cohabitation

Menno ter Bals

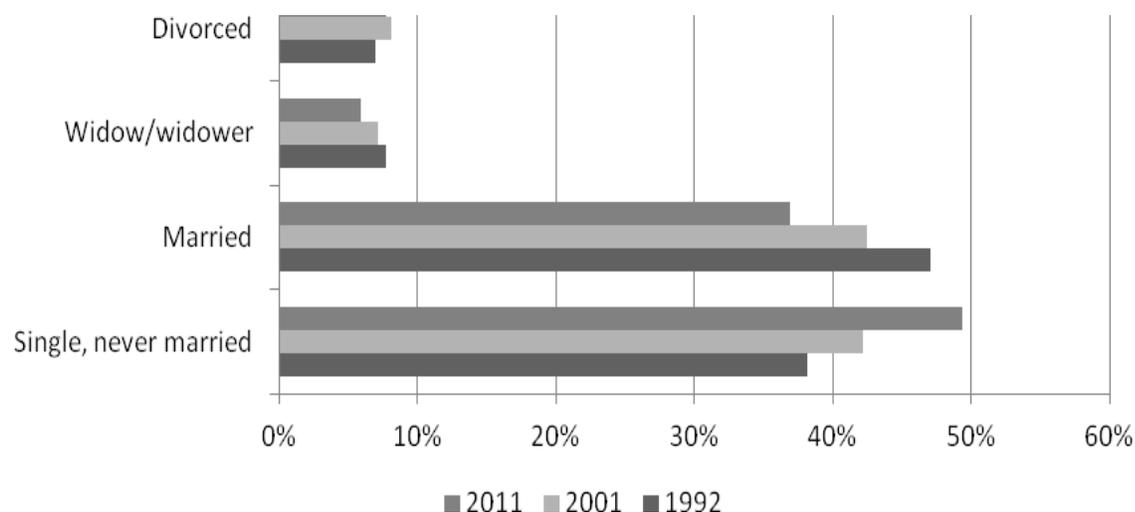
## Introduction

During the Census 2011 the marital and the cohabitational status of the population 16 years or older, were registered. This article provides an analysis of the population prone to marriage and cohabitation, and certain developments from the censuses of 1992 and/or 2001 to 2011 are examined. The article is an excerpt of the chapter on marital status and cohabitation in the Census 2011 report 'Demography of Curaçao' (ter Bals, 2014).

## Marital status of the population 16 years or older

In 2011, almost half of the population 16 years or older had never been married. The other half of the population can be classified as *ever-married*<sup>1</sup>, the largest share being married (37%) and smaller shares being divorced (8%) or widowed (6%) as is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Population 16 years or older by marital status, standardized\*, Census 1992, 2001 and 2011**



\*standardized to the population age structure of 2011

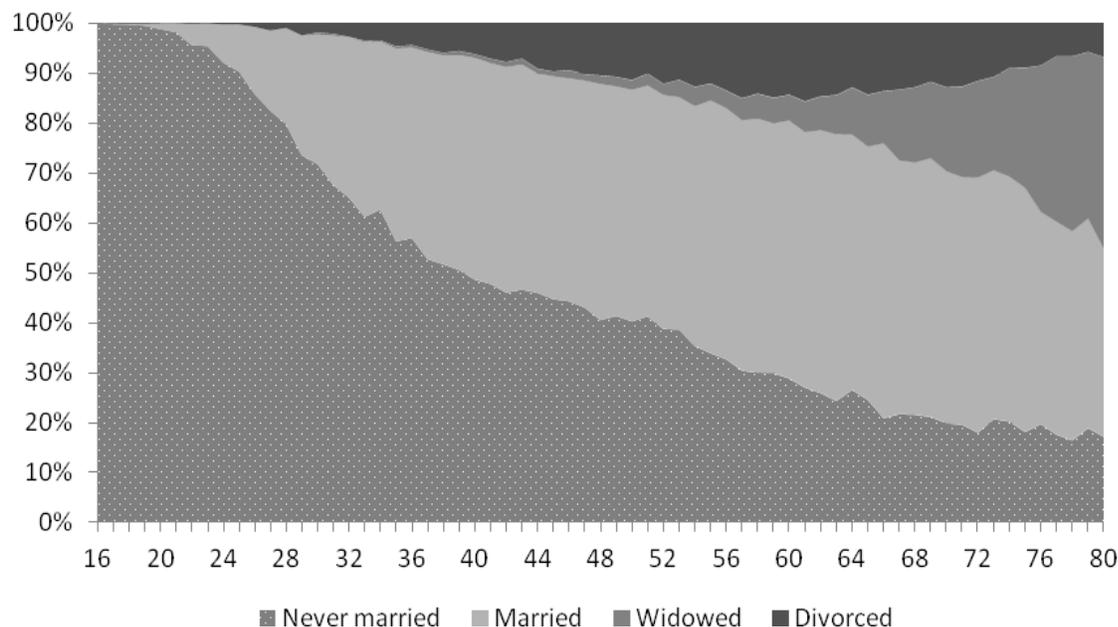
<sup>1</sup> Ever married women or men are persons who have been married at least once in their lives although their current marital status may not be “married”.

Stripped from age compositional effects (standardization to the age composition of 2011), the proportion of the never-married population has increased from 38 percent in 1992 to 42 percent in 2001 and finally to 49 percent in 2011. Likewise, if age structure would not interfere, the share of the married population has decreased by 10 percentage points between 1992 (47%) and 2011 (37%). Between 2001 and 2011 the rate of change has been greater than in the decade before. While the proportions of the divorced and widowed populations are significantly smaller, a notable decline in the proportion of widowers has taken place. The drop of 2 percentage points from 1992 (8%) to 2011 (6%) seems to indicate a reduction in the gap in life expectancy between male and female. Men have gained relatively more years of life expectancy as opposed to women in the past decade, which means that wives, who on average still live longer than men, live longer as married women and spend a shorter period as widows after surviving their husbands.

## Marital status by age and sex

Figure 2 illustrates the effect of age on the distribution of marital status among population. It is clearly visible how marital status changes over age. In general, at younger ages the proportion of the never-married population is high and at higher ages this share decreases in favor of the ever-married population, i.e. married, divorced or widowed.

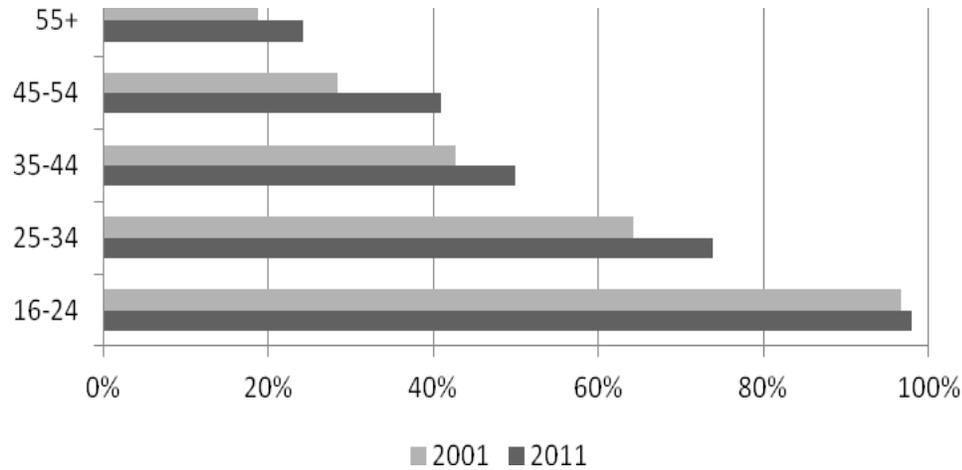
**Figure 2. Population 16 years or older by marital status and age, Census 2011**



According to the UN report 'World Marriage Patterns' (United Nations, 2011) young adults in many countries stay single, postpone marriage or choose a consensual union above marriage more often nowadays than before. Accordingly, an increase in especially the proportion of never-married young adults is expected. Curaçao seems to fit this pattern, but, as Figure 3 points out, the increase in

the proportion of the never-married population in Curaçao from 2001 to 2011 is not only restricted to the younger population. From age 25 up to 55 and over, larger shares of persons have never married. The biggest increase has taken place between ages 45 and 54 where the share has gone up from 28 percent to 41 percent. Apparently, marriage is less common in 2011 than it was a decade earlier.

**Figure 3. Proportion of the population 16+ who were never married by age group, Census 2001 and 2011**



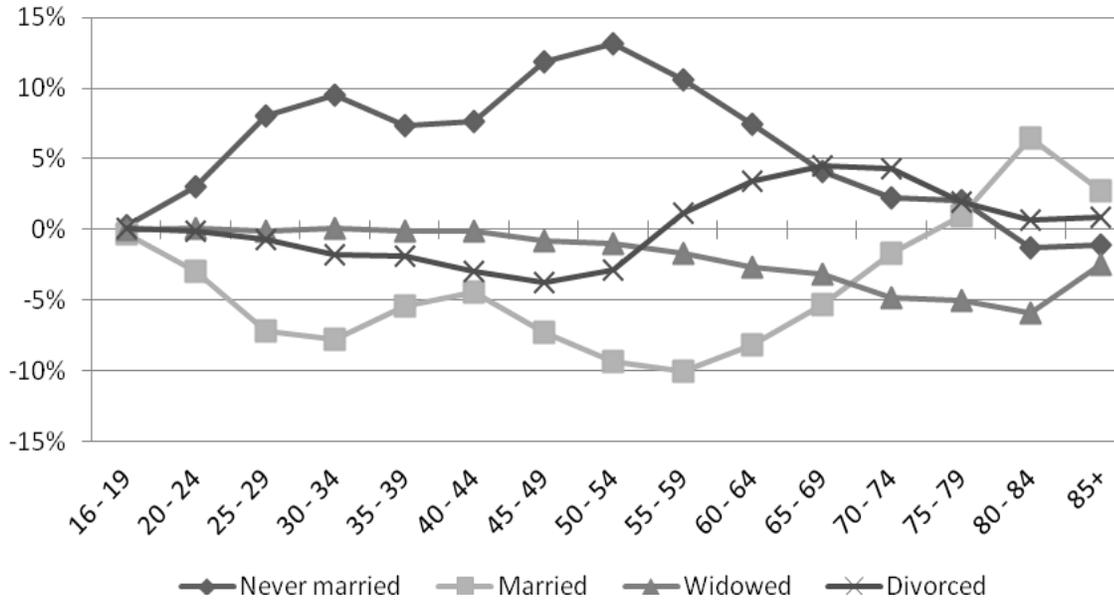
The increasing share of never-married population can be attributed to the decrease in the ever-married population, which is visualized in

Figure 4. All age groups that experienced an increase in the never-married proportion between 2001 and 2011 also showed a decrease in the proportion of married persons, while at the same time a change in the share of the divorced population has occurred. Between ages 25 and 55, the proportion of the divorced population has decreased for all age groups, while for the ages of 55 years and over the proportion has increased (

Figure 4 and

Figure 5).

**Figure 4. Percentage point change in the proportion marital status by age group from Census 2001 to Census 2011**



Based on

Figure 5, the increased share of divorced persons in the older age cohorts (55+) seems to be a cohort effect of divorced persons who have remained divorced and did not re-marry between 2001 and 2011. For example, in the 45-49 cohort almost 14 percent were divorced in 2001. Ten years later the surviving persons from this cohort, having reached the 55-59 age cohort, show a similar proportion of divorced members. This goes for all age cohorts up to age 70-74, after which the share of the divorced population declines due to a rapidly increasing proportion of the widowed population as mortality begins to have a significant effect.

**Figure 5. Proportion of the population 16+ who were divorced by age group, Census 2001 and 2011**

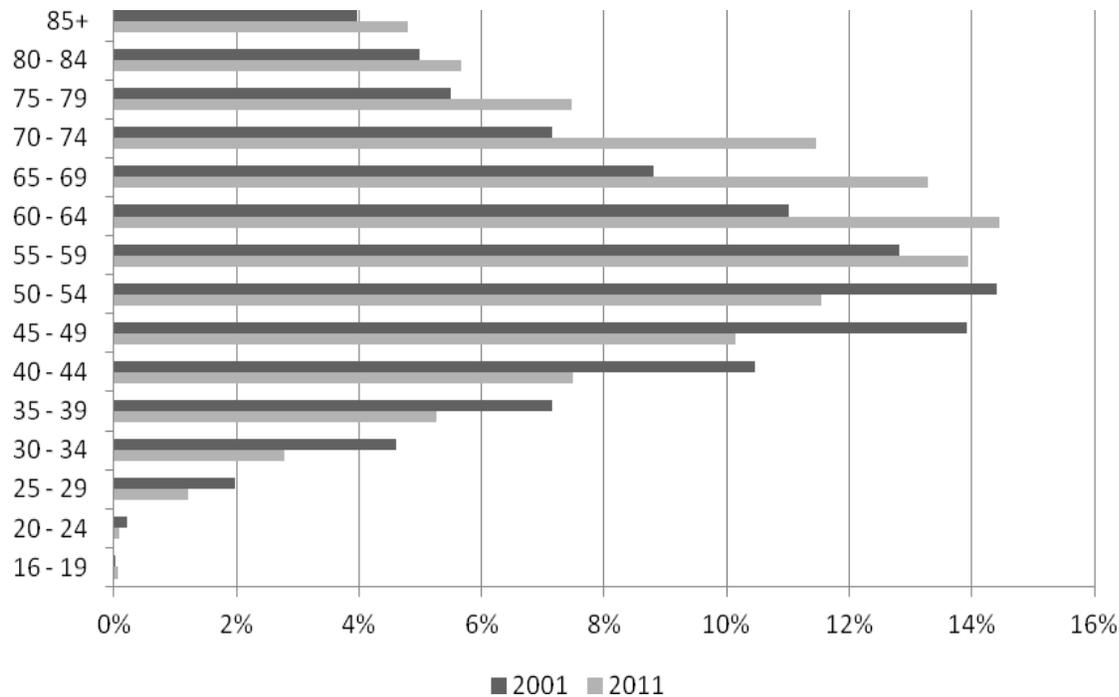
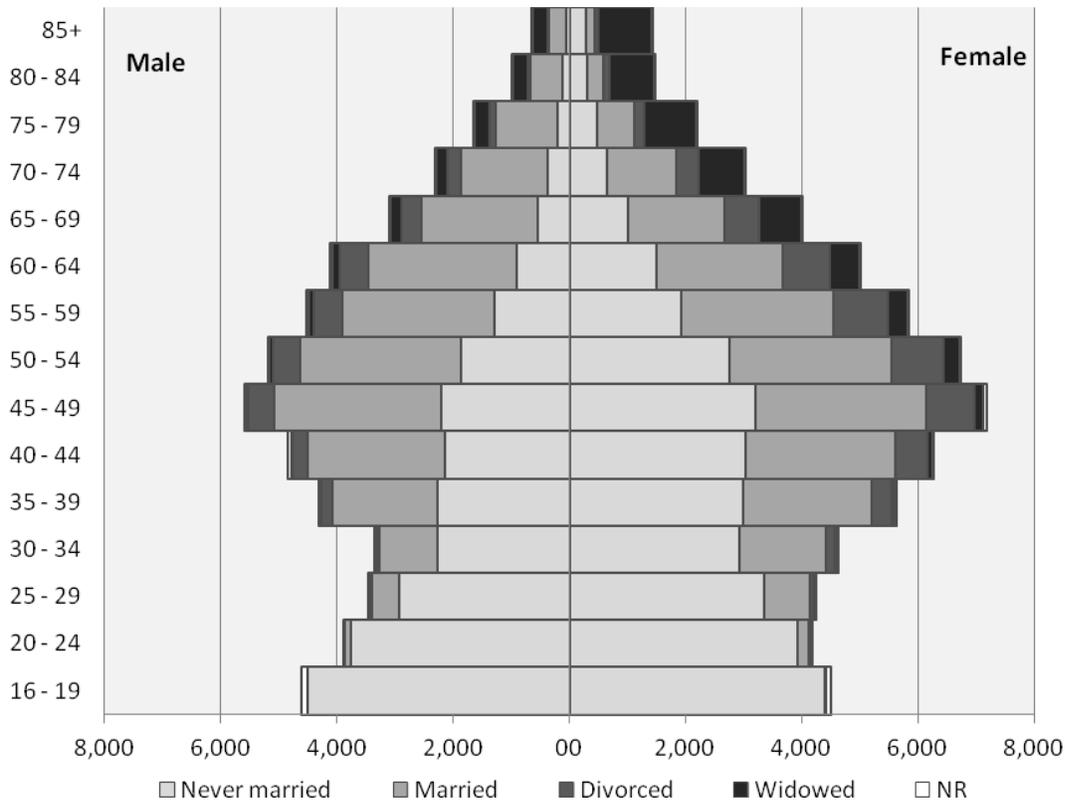


Figure 6 gives the population pyramid of the population 16 years or older by marital status in 2011. Several notable observations can be made on the distribution of marital status by age and sex. First, for both sexes the number and percentage of the never-married population decreases with an increase in age. In all age groups of 20 years or over there is a surplus of women compared to men. As may be expected, the result is a surplus of never-married women compared to never-married men, considering the fact that marriages are almost exclusively between male and female partners<sup>2</sup>. The *proportion* of never-married females is only higher in the age groups of 40 years and above. This indicates that men tend to start marrying at a somewhat higher age than women, but eventually catch up and are more prone to being (ever) married at ages 40 years and upwards.

Figure 7 illustrates this well by depicting the proportion of never-married males and females by single ages in one graph.

<sup>2</sup> While same-sex marriages are not conducted in Curaçao, 99 same-sex couples who married outside of Curaçao have been registered in the census. This number however is so small that it does not cause notable distortions in the overall married population gender balance. Furthermore, of the married population about 3,000 persons were registered as living separated from their spouse (e.g. living in another household or living abroad). As the sex ratio of this group was equal to the sex ratio of the married population no distorting effects on the overall married population gender balance are inflicted by this either.

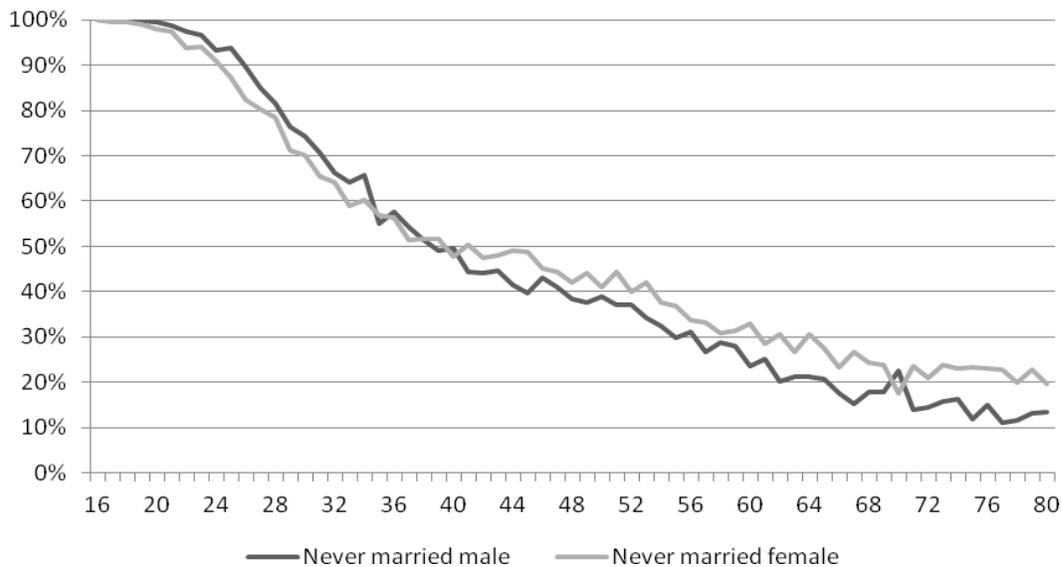
**Figure 6. Population 16 years or older by marital status, age and sex, Census 2011**



Second, the amount of divorced women is higher than for men in all age groups. At age group 55-59 nearly twice as many females than males are divorced. This suggests that men tend to re-marry more often than women. This sounds plausible, because the surplus of women could make for a more favorable marriage market for men than for women. The pool of women eligible for marriage, i.e. never married, widowed and divorced women aged 16 years or older, is almost 1.5 times bigger than the pool of available men (44,195 women versus 30,200 men).

Thirdly, after age 50 the number of widowed women starts to increase by age. The number of divorced and married women steadily declines by age group, up to the highest age group, while the number of widowed women increases from every age group to the next. At the same time, the number of male widowers remains relatively small, which can be explained by women’s higher life expectancy as opposed to men’s. In 2011 the women’s life expectancy at birth is 80.4 years against 74.2 years for men. Furthermore, analysis of population registry data on marriage in Curaçao has pointed out that women tend to marry at a younger age than men (in 2011, women getting married were on average 4.5 years younger than their male marriage partners) which also adds to the higher amount of women surviving their husbands.

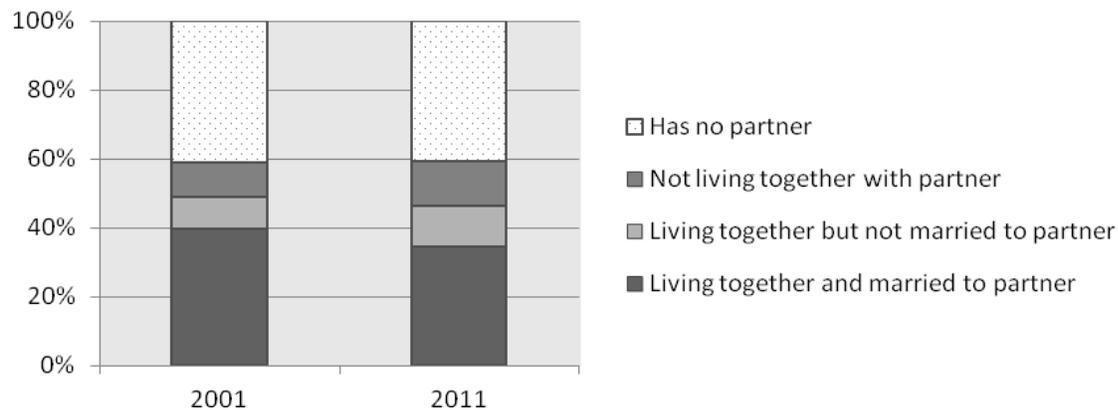
**Figure 7. Proportion of never married males and females by age, 2011**



## Cohabitation

As is shown in the preceding paragraphs, marriage has lost in “market share” in the past decades. In many parts of the world today marriage is making place for other types of living arrangements, for example cohabitation, single person households and single parenthood (Taylor, et al., 2010). According to the United Nations Population Division consensual unions<sup>3</sup> are common in many countries, but particularly prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean (United Nations, 2011).

**Figure 8. Population aged 16 years or older by cohabitational status, Census 2001\* and 2011**



\* Standardized to the age composition of the 2011 Census population

<sup>3</sup> Two people usually living in the same dwelling, but not in a registered marriage to each other, who: share mutual concern for each other; have a degree of economic, social and emotional interdependence; and consider their relationship to be akin to marriage.

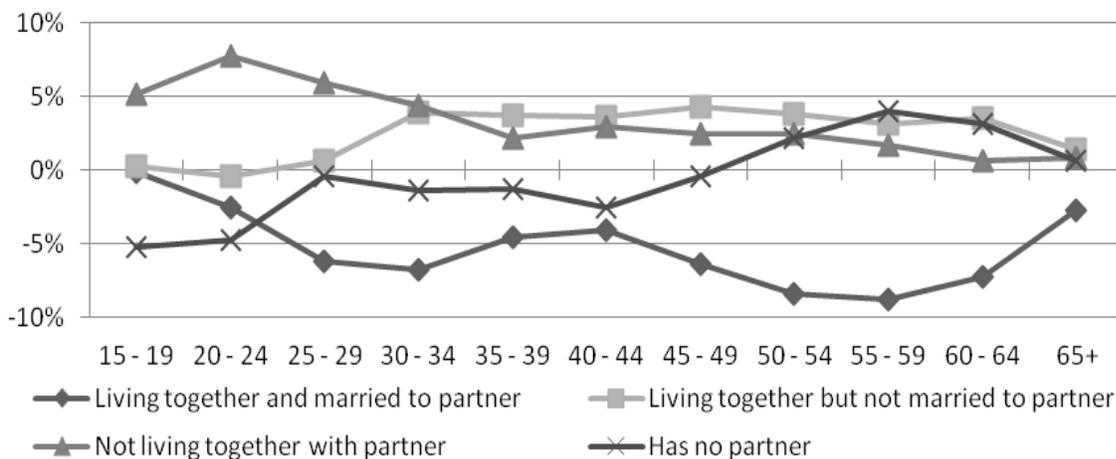
In 2011 in Curaçao about 12 percent of the population 16 years or older stated that they are living together with but are not married to their partner, i.e. in consensual union, which is a slight increase from 2001 when a little over 9 percent of the population responded this way (Figure 8). Taken together with the population that is married and living together with their partner the group of persons that are living together compose some 46 percent of the population in 2011, almost 3 percentage points less than in 2001 (49%). In 2011 a larger share of the population has indicated that they were not living together with their partner, almost 13 percent against 10 percent (2001).

### Cohabitation by age and sex

In all age groups 30 years and older the proportion of persons living in consensual union has increased slightly with about 4 percentage points in most age groups from 2001 to 2011 (Figure 9). Another noteworthy shift seems to be the bigger share of adolescents and young adults (up to 24 years of age) that do not live together with their partner and the simultaneous decline in the group's share who indicated not having a partner. The change in the proportion of population that reported being married and living together closely resembles the change in the proportion of married population as depicted in

Figure 4.

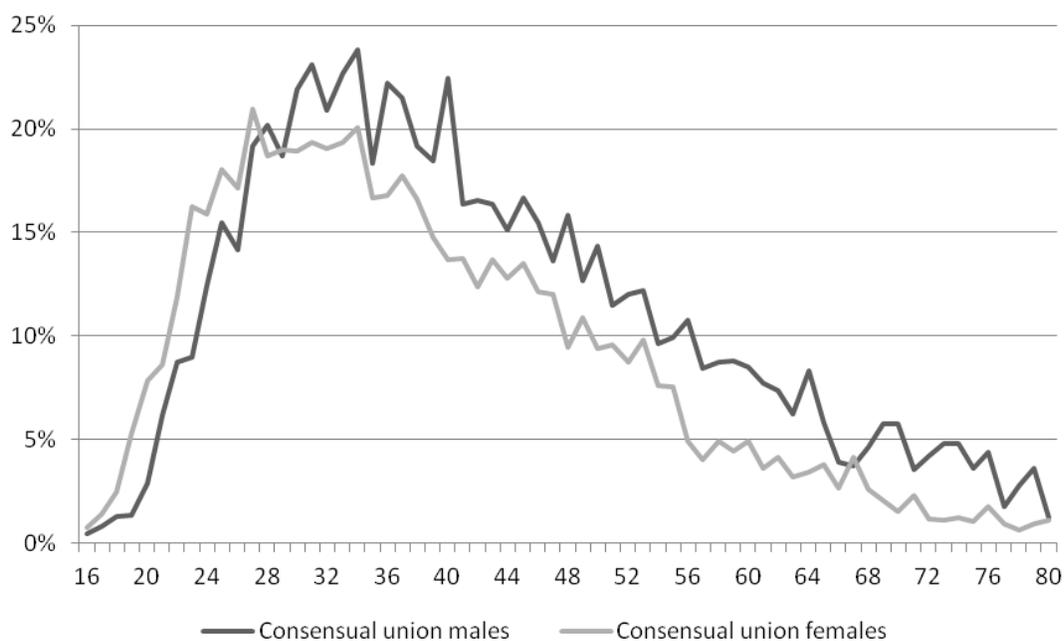
**Figure 9. Percentage point change in the proportion cohabitational status by age group from Census 2001 to Census 2011**



Up to age 30, a higher proportion of women than men live in consensual union. From age 30 onwards the pattern reverses and men are more prone to live in consensual union at each age (

Figure 10). Consensual unions are especially common among persons in their twenties and thirties with proportions consistently above 15 percent for both males and females. However, females tend to reach these levels somewhat earlier than males (around age 23 against about 25) and males tend to stay on these levels somewhat longer than females (around age 46 for males against about 38 for females). By increasing age the proportion of males and females in consensual union gradually declines after approaching age 40.

**Figure 10. Proportion of males and females in consensual union by age groups, 2011**



## Further reading

More information on marital status and cohabitation, including data tables, can be found in the Publication Series Census 2011 report 'Demography of Curaçao', which can be freely downloaded from the CBS website ([www.cbs.cw](http://www.cbs.cw)). The chapter on marital status and cohabitation includes an analysis of the singulate mean age at marriage, as well as an analysis on civil status by country of birth.

Furthermore, the CBS website offers a selection of tables on marital status and cohabitation from the Census 2011, but also information on annually registered marriages and divorces in Curaçao.

## Bibliography

Taylor, P., Parker, K., Wang, W., Morin, R., Horowitz, J., & Cohn, D. (2010). *The Decline of Marriage And Rise of New Families*. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. Retrieved June 26, 2014, from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/11/18/the-decline-of-marriage-and-rise-of-new-families/>

ter Bals, M. (2014). *Demography of Curaçao*. Central Bureau of Statistics. Willemstad: Central Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <http://cbs.cw/cbs/themes/Census%202001/Publications/Census%202001-2014121625641.pdf>

United Nations. (2011). World Marriage Patterns. *Population Facts, 1*. Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts\\_2011-1.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2011-1.pdf)