



# Press release

Statistics Netherlands

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## ***One quarter of Dutch babies born to unmarried parents***

Last year in the Netherlands more than 50 thousand babies were born to unmarried parents. Statistics Netherlands forecasts that this number will increase further this year, and that for the first time more than one quarter of all babies will be born to couples who are not married. This proportion of births outside marriage has doubled in the last ten years. In spite of this surge, within Europe the Netherlands is only the middle ranks of extra-marital birth rates: in Sweden more than half of children are born to unmarried couples.

### ***Babies increasingly born out of wedlock***

In 2001 an expected 204 thousand children will be born in the Netherlands, 56 thousand of whom will be born to unmarried parents. This is the first time that more than a quarter of newborn babies have parents who are not married. In 1991 12% of children were born outside marriage, so the share of out-of-wedlock births has more than doubled in the space of ten years.

The share of extra-marital births started to increase in the eighties. Before 1980 less than 5% of children were born outside marriage, usually only to young single women who had become pregnant by accident.

### ***Most cohabiters marry before first baby***

The increase in the extra-marital birth rate since the 1980s can be attributed to the strong rise in number of couples living together without being unmarried, although it is more common for them to marry before they start a family. Only one in three women are unmarried when they have their first baby, and many of those who are not married then do so later. This means that in the end only few children grow up with unmarried parents

### ***Netherlands ranks middle in Europe***

In spite of the strong increase in the share of extra-marital births the Netherlands ranks only in the middle region in Europe on this issue. In northern Europe in particular the percentage of extra marital births is considerably higher than in the Netherlands. While in Iceland and Swe-

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den over half of newborn babies have unmarried parents, in countries like France and the United Kingdom, too, relatively more children are born in unmarried relationships than in the Netherlands. In southern European countries on the other hand extra-marital births are still quite exceptional.

### ***Young mothers in particular unmarried***

Extra-marital births are most common to young mothers. In 2000 more than half of women who had their first baby under the age of 25 were not married. Ten years ago, this was only a quarter. Although for many young women today, pregnancy is no longer a reason to get married, many women do marry their partners as yet at a later stage.

First-time mothers aged over 35 are also relatively often not married. Four out of every ten women who have their first baby aged over 35 are unmarried. In many cases these are women who are no longer in their first relationship.

Technical note: a birth is defined as marital (or legitimate) if the mother is married at the time of birth, or if she is divorced or widowed and the baby is born within 307 days of the end of the marriage. Extra-marital births thus comprise babies born to mothers who have never been married, are divorced or who are widows.

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