2013

MacPherson, 2016

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2015

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Key facts

In 2015:

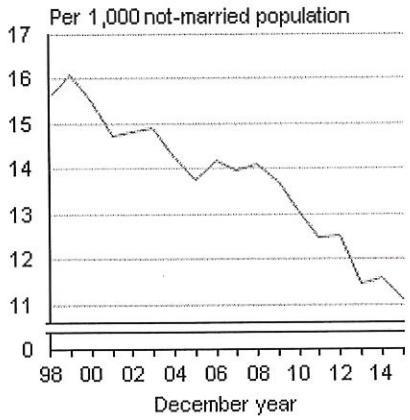
Marriages and civil unions

- 19,947 marriages and civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents – of these, 471 were same-sex marriages or civil unions.
- There were 13,914 first marriages and civil unions, 5,982 remarriages or civil unions, and 57 couples (both same-sex and opposite-sex) who transferred between either their marriage or civil union.
- The general marriage rate was 11.1 marriages and civil unions per 1,000 mean estimated population aged 16+ who are not married or in a civil union (transfers to and from marriage or civil union are excluded).
- An additional 2,910 marriages or civil unions were registered to overseas residents – of these, 438 were same-sex marriages or civil unions.

Divorces

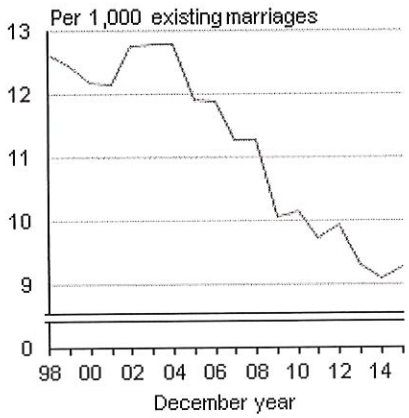
- 8,463 married and 60 civil union couples were granted divorces in New Zealand.
- There were 9.3 divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages and civil unions.

General marriage rate
1998–2015



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Divorce rate
1998–2015



Source: Statistics New Zealand

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Commentary

- Changes to marriages, civil unions and divorces data
- Slight drop in the number of marriages and civil unions in 2015
- Almost half of same-sex couples marrying are from overseas
- 7 in 10 civil unions were to opposite-sex resident couples
- Divorces granted to 8,463 married couples and 60 civil union couples in 2015
- About one-third of marriages end in divorce

Changes to marriages, civil unions, and divorces data

With same-sex marriage introduced in 2013, the number of civil unions has decreased significantly and interest has shifted from civil unions and marriages to same-sex and opposite-sex couples. As a result we have made changes to marriages, civil unions, and divorces data.

- Marriages and civil unions have been combined in most cases, with same-sex and opposite-sex breakdowns given where possible.
- Divorce data now includes the dissolution of both marriages and civil unions.
- All marriage, civil union, and divorce data has been randomly rounded to protect confidentiality. Individual figures may not add up to totals, and values for the same data may vary in different tables. Median ages have been recalculated using randomly rounded data. We are committed to ensuring confidentiality by not releasing information that could identify individuals.
- New data series have been added to Infoshare under the subject category 'population' and group 'marriages, civil unions, and divorces.' The previous Infoshare series have been discontinued and will not be updated but can still be viewed for a short time by clicking 'Show discontinued' under 'Subject categories.'

Slight drop in the number of marriages and civil unions in 2015

New Zealand residents registered 19,947 marriages and civil unions in the December 2015 year, down slightly from 20,175 in 2014, but more than the 19,425 registered in 2013. Between 2005 and 2012, the annual number of resident marriages and civil unions averaged 21,389.

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The general marriage rate (number of marriages and civil unions per 1,000 aged 16 years and over who are not married or in a civil union) was 11.1 in 2015. This is around one-quarter of the 1971 peak, when the rate reached 45.5.

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act 2013 defined marriage as the union of two people, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. This led to the first same-sex marriages in New Zealand on 19 August 2013.

In 2015, 19,479 opposite-sex and 471 same-sex resident couples married or formed a civil union. Among same-sex couples, more female (282) than male (189) couples married or formed a civil union. Since the change in the definition of marriage, there have been more opposite-sex couples forming civil unions than same-sex couples.

7 in 10 civil unions were to opposite-sex resident couples

For the second consecutive year, more opposite-sex couples registered a civil union than same-sex couples in 2015. Around 7 in every 10 civil unions registered in 2015 were to opposite-sex couples, compared with 6 in every 10 in 2014, and an average of about 2 in 10 in 2005–13.

However, the number of opposite-sex couples registering a civil union has dropped since the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2013 – down from an average of around 70 in 2006–13 to 39 in 2015. Same-sex civil unions have dropped even more significantly, down from over 200 each year from 2005 to 2012, to 18 in 2015.

Almost half of same-sex couples marrying are from overseas

In 2015, 2,910 marriages and civil unions were registered to overseas residents. Of these, 438 were same-sex couples, and 2,475 were opposite-sex couples. Overseas residents made up nearly one-half of all same-sex couples marrying or forming civil unions in New Zealand in 2015.

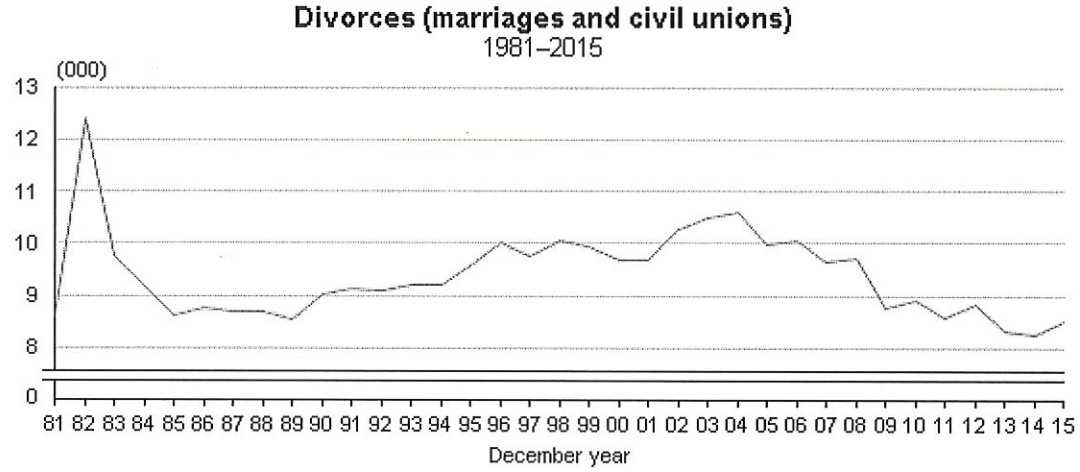
Of opposite-sex couples travelling here to marry, 60 percent had one or both partners born in New Zealand, compared with 25 percent of same-sex couples.

Divorces granted to 8,463 married couples and 60 civil union couples in 2015

In 2015, the Family Court granted 8,463 married couples and 60 civil union couples a divorce. This is equivalent to 9.3 divorces for every 1,000 estimated married or civil union couples.

In 1981, the number of divorces rose sharply after the passing of the Family Proceedings Act 1980, which allowed for the dissolution of marriage on the grounds of irreconcilable differences. Divorces recorded a temporary high of 12,396 in 1982. Subsequently, the number fell to a low of 8,556 in 1989 before increasing to a high of 10,608 in 2004. Since then the number of divorces has tended to decline.

The trend in age at divorce has been moving upward. This partly reflects the marked trend toward later marriages, which started in the early 1970s. The median age at divorce in 2015 (including the dissolution of couples from both marriages and civil unions) was 46.5 years for men and 44.2 years for women, compared with 43.3 years and 40.8 years, in 2005.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

About one-third of marriages end in divorce

Annual divorce statistics do not give a complete picture of the number of marriages ending in divorce. Analysis of divorce statistics by year of marriage shows that just over one-third (36 percent) of New Zealanders who married in 1990 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). This compares with 34 percent for those who married in 1980, and 28 percent for those who married in 1970.

Data about the proportion of marriages ending in divorce is now available in Infoshare under the subject category 'population' and group 'marriages, civil unions, and divorces'. Look for the table 'Divorces, proportion of marriages ending in divorce before 25 years of marriage.'

For more detailed data see the Excel tables in the 'Downloads' box.

Definitions

About marriages, civil unions, and divorces

This information release measures the number of marriages, civil unions, and divorces registered in New Zealand each year. Along with birth and death statistics, marriage, civil union, and divorce statistics are often referred to as 'vital statistics'. They provide basic information about the structure of the population and how it changes over time.

More definitions

Civil union: the act, ceremony, or process by which the legal relationship of two people is constituted. In New Zealand, a civil union may be solemnised either by a civil union celebrant or before a registrar of civil unions. A licence must be obtained from a registrar before a civil union can be solemnised, and notice must be given by one of the parties to a registrar.

The Civil Union Act 2004 came into force on 26 April 2005. This Act introduced a new form of legal relationship. A civil union may be entered into by couples of the same sex or by couples of different sexes. The first civil union ceremonies were celebrated on 29 April 2005.

Civil union statistics are based on the number of civil unions registered in New Zealand. A civil union is classed as a resident civil union if partner two is resident in New Zealand and as an overseas civil union if partner two is an overseas resident.

A couple who are currently married can transfer their relationship to a civil union. A couple in a civil union can transfer their relationship to a marriage

Divorce: the dissolution of a marriage or civil union. An application for marriage or civil union dissolution can be made by either partner on grounds that the marriage or civil union has broken down irreconcilably, provided a two-year separation requirement is satisfied. One or both partners must usually live in New Zealand. The Family Court grants Dissolution Orders. Family Courts are located throughout New Zealand but since 2014 almost all applications for divorce have been processed by the Wellington court.

From 2011, divorce statistics are based on the year the order of dissolution was granted. Data before 2011 is based on the date information about the order was received by Statistics New Zealand. For example, 2010 data may include an order granted before 2010. Hence, data from 2011 onwards may not be directly comparable with data before 2011.

Divorce data are published annually and unless otherwise stated refer to orders for dissolution of marriage and civil unions granted in New Zealand (that is, civil unions are included).

Divorce rate: the number of orders for dissolution of marriage and civil union granted in New Zealand per 1,000 estimated existing marriages and civil unions.

First marriages: marriages or civil unions where neither partner has been previously married or in a civil union.

General marriage rate: the number of marriages and civil unions per 1,000 mean estimated population aged 16 years and over who are not married or in a civil union (transfers to and from marriage or civil unions are excluded).

Marriage: Before 19 August 2013, a marriage involved the act, ceremony, or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife was constituted.

From 19 August 2013, a marriage involves the act, ceremony, or process by which the legal relationship of two people, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity is constituted.

In New Zealand, marriage may be solemnised either by a celebrant or before a registrar of marriages. A licence must be obtained from a registrar before a marriage by a celebrant can be solemnised, and notice must be given by one of the parties to a registrar.

All couples (opposite-sex and same-sex) can now transfer their civil union to marriage without first dissolving the civil union.

Unless otherwise stated, marriage statistics from 1991 are based on the number of marriages registered in New Zealand where partner two is resident in New Zealand. Before 1991, marriages are based on the number of marriages registered in New Zealand of bridegrooms resident in New Zealand and bridegrooms visiting from overseas.

Median age: half are younger and half older than this age.

Partner two: The person whose details are entered in the right hand column of the marriage or civil union license application form. For opposite-sex marriages this is usually the bridegroom.

Remarriage: marriages or civil unions where one or both partners have been previously married or in a civil union with a different partner. Remarriages do not include transfers to and from marriage or civil union. Transfers are included in total marriages and civil unions.

Related links

Next release

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2016 will be released in May 2017.

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Past releases

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces has links to past releases.

Related information

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces has links to reports, articles, and further information.

Data quality

General information

- More information – DataInfo+
- Data source
- Geographical information
- Confidentiality

More information – DataInfo+

Marriages – DataInfo+
General methodology used to produce marriage statistics, and related metadata.

Civil unions – DataInfo+
General methodology used to produce civil union statistics, and related metadata.

Divorce – DataInfo+
General methodology used to produce divorces statistics, and related metadata.

Principles and protocols for producers of Tier 1 statistics
Statistics in this release have been produced in accordance with the Official Statistics System principles and protocols for producers of Tier 1 statistics for quality. They conform to the Statistics NZ Methodological Standard for Reporting of Data Quality.

Data source

Marriages and civil unions: Statistics NZ receives a monthly electronic file of registered marriages and civil unions from Births, Deaths, and Marriages. We are responsible for processing and publishing statistics derived from the marriage and civil union registrations.

Divorces: Ministry of Justice provides a quarterly electronic file of orders for dissolution of marriage and civil unions granted in New Zealand. The data is compiled from information collected by the family courts.

Geographical information

Combined civil unions and marriages (same-sex and opposite-sex) are available by broad geographic areas including Auckland, Wellington, the rest of the North Island, Canterbury, and the rest of the South Island.

Auckland includes the Auckland council area.

Wellington includes:

- Porirua city
- Upper Hutt city
- Lower Hutt city
- Wellington city
- Kapiti Coast district
- Masterton district

- Carterton district
- South Wairarapa district.

Canterbury includes:

- Kaikoura district
- Hurunui district
- Waimakariri district
- Selwyn district
- Ashburton district
- Timaru district
- Mackenzie district
- Waimate district
- Christchurch city.

The relatively small number of civil unions and same-sex marriages prohibits a more detailed geographic breakdown.

Marriages and civil unions combined are available by territorial authority (city and district council) from Infoshare.

Court was the only field giving a geographic breakdown of where divorces actually occur in New Zealand. All dissolutions are now processed through Wellington, and as such, we cannot provide a geographic breakdown. We do not collect information on the residence of the parties at the time the divorce becomes legal.

Confidentiality

To comply with Statistics NZ's confidentiality protocols, some categories are collapsed or aggregated in tables and datasets.

We applied random rounding to three (RR3) to all data to protect confidentiality. Individual figures may not add up to totals, and values for the same data may vary in different tables.

What is RR3? Random rounding to 3 is used to disguise small counts, but all cells in a table are randomly rounded. Counts that are already a multiple of three are left unchanged. Those not a multiple of three are rounded to one of the two nearest multiples. For example, a one will be rounded to either a zero or a three. Each value in the table is rounded independently. This means counts may not sum to totals, but ensures that published totals are within two of the original number.

We apply random rounding to all published tables and to customised tables provided to researchers.

In some tables, where rows or columns contain many cells with low values, we may also suppress, collapse, or aggregate rows or columns.

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Tables

The following tables are available in Excel format from the 'Downloads' box. If you have problems viewing the files, see opening files and PDFs.

1. Marriages and civil unions, and marriage rates
2. Median age at marriage or civil union by legal relationship status
3. Divorces and divorce rates (marriages and civil unions)
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce
5. Divorces (marriages and civil unions) involving people with children aged under 17 years
6. Civil unions by relationship type
7. Marriages by relationship type
8. Marriages and civil unions by broad geographic area, year ended December 2015

Access more data on Infoshare

Infoshare allows you to organise data in the way that best meets your needs. You can view the resulting tables onscreen or download them.

Use Infoshare
For this release, select the following categories from the Infoshare homepage:
Subject category: **Population**
Group: **Marriage and Divorce Rates**
Group: **Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces**

Next release

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2016 will be released in May 2017.