

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2012

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Key facts

In 2012:

Marriages

- 20,521 marriages were registered to New Zealand residents.
- There were 14,214 first marriages and 6,307 remarriages.
- The general marriage rate was 11.8 marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over.
- An additional 2,422 marriages were registered to overseas residents.

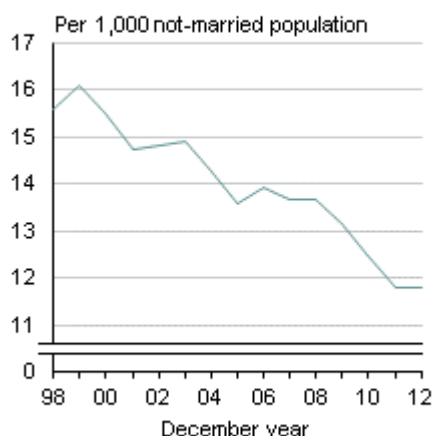
Civil unions

- 303 civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents – of these, 235 were same-sex unions.
- 87 civil unions were registered to overseas residents.

Divorces

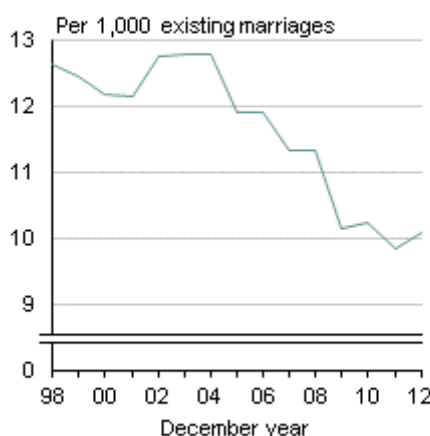
- 8,785 divorces were granted in New Zealand.
- There were 10.1 divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages.

General marriage rate
1998–2012



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Divorce rate
1998–2012



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Geoff Bascand
Government Statistician

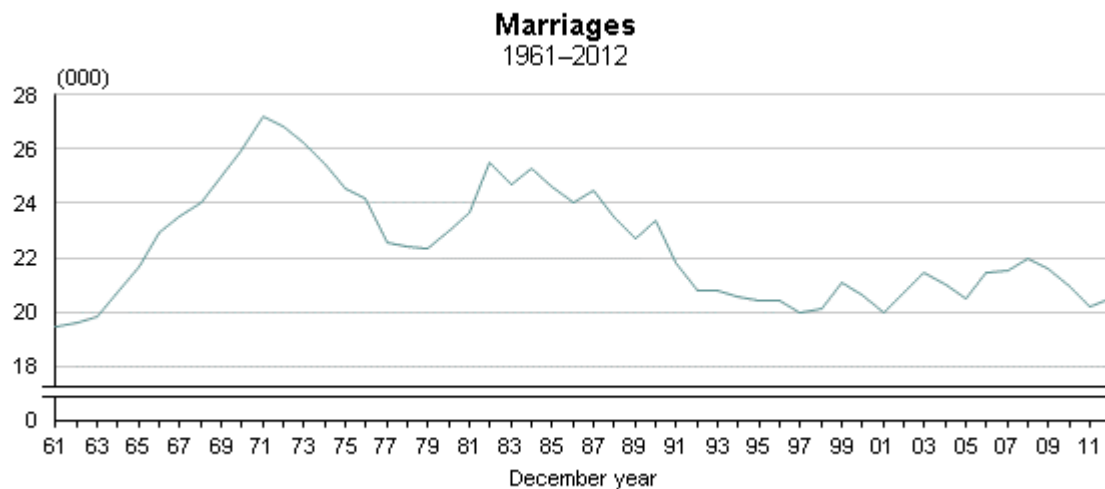
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Commentary

- Small rise in number of couples tying the knot
- New Zealanders marrying later
- Saturdays most popular day for weddings
- Opposite-sex couples make up 22 percent of civil unions in 2012
- Divorce rate was 10.1 in 2012
- About one-third of marriages end in divorce
- First same sex marriages soon to be celebrated in New Zealand
- Provisional civil union and marriage data

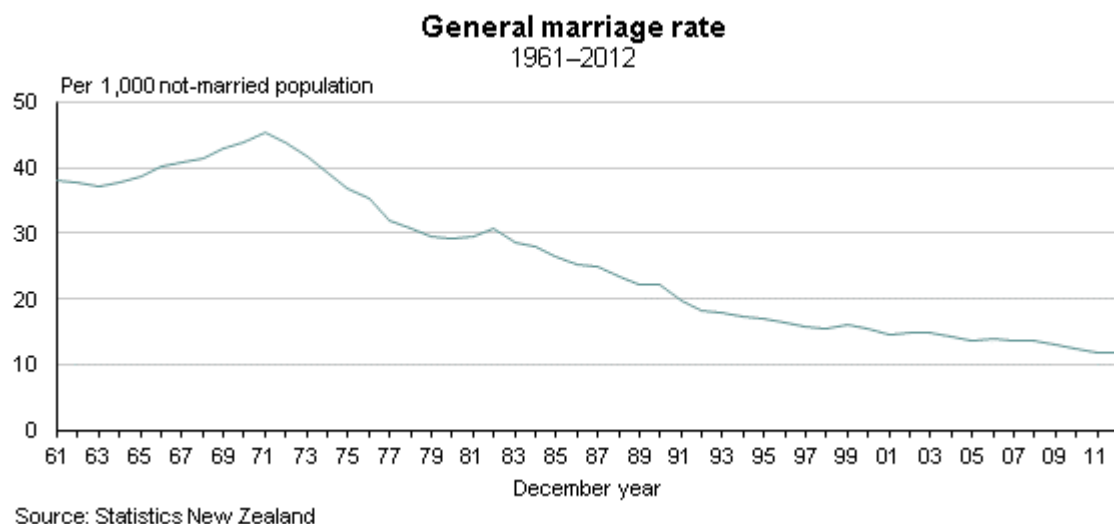
Small rise in number of couples tying the knot

There were 20,521 marriages registered to New Zealand residents in the December 2012 year. This is slightly higher than the number of marriages registered in 2011 (20,231). Over the last decade, the average annual number of resident marriages has been 21,108. The highest number of marriages in any year was in 1971, when 27,199 couples tied the knot.



The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) was 11.8 per 1,000 in 2012. This is nearly one-quarter of the 1971 peak, when the rate reached 45.5 per 1,000.

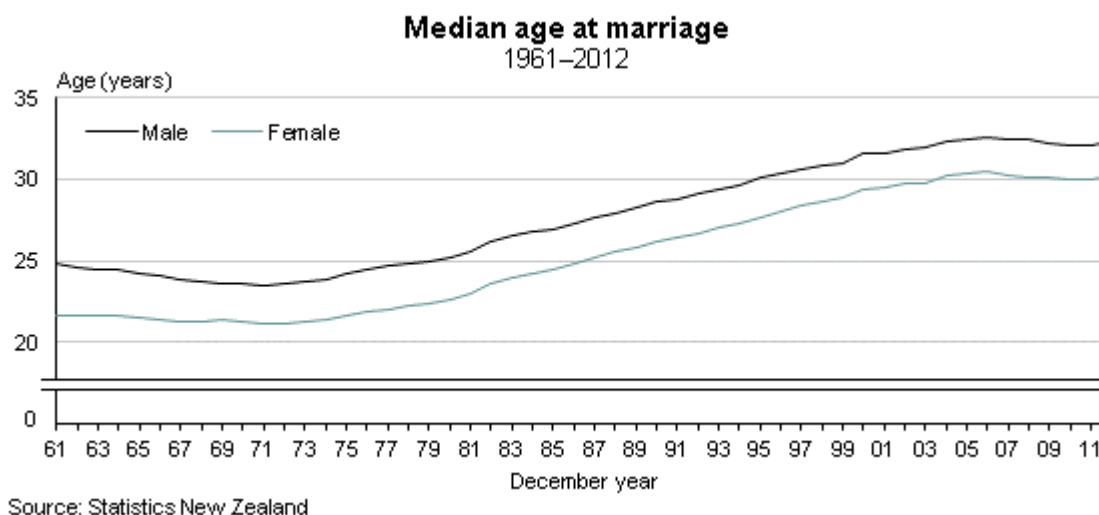
The marriage rate dropped to 19.6 per 1,000 in 1991 (less than one-half of the 1971 rate). Over the next 20 years the rate dropped more slowly, to 11.8 per 1,000 in 2012. Many factors have contributed to the fall in the marriage rate, including the growth in de facto unions, a general trend towards delayed marriage, and more New Zealanders remaining single.



New Zealanders marrying later

New Zealanders are marrying later than in the past. In 2012, the median age at first marriage was 30.0 years for men and 28.5 years for women – up from 27.0 and 24.9 years in 1992. Although the median age at first marriage has increased over the last 20 years, most of the increase occurred before 2004 and the median age has remained relatively constant since then. In 1971, when marriage rates peaked, the median age at first marriage was 23.0 years for men and 20.8 years for women.

Among all marriages (first marriages and remarriages), the median age at marriage reached historic lows in 1971 – 23.5 years for men and 21.2 years for women – before rising to 32.3 years for men and 30.2 years for women in 2012.



Saturdays most popular day for weddings

The most popular day of the week to wed is Saturday, with just over half of marriages celebrated on this day. Friday is the second most popular day; about 1 in 5 couples marry on a Friday. In contrast, only 1 in 25 marriages are celebrated on either a Tuesday or Wednesday.

The warmer months of January, February, and March remain the most popular for marriage. In the December 2012 year, 4 in 10 marriages were celebrated in the first three months of the year. In contrast, just 1 in 10 couples married in the cooler months of June, July, and August.

The most popular day to marry in 2012 was 25 February when 491 couples married.

Opposite-sex couples make up 22 percent of civil unions in 2012

In 2012, 303 civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents. These comprised 68 opposite-sex unions and 235 same-sex unions (93 male and 142 female). In addition, 87 civil unions were registered to overseas residents, bringing the total number of registrations to 390. About 1 in 5 civil unions involved overseas residents in 2012, compared with roughly 1 in 10 marriages.

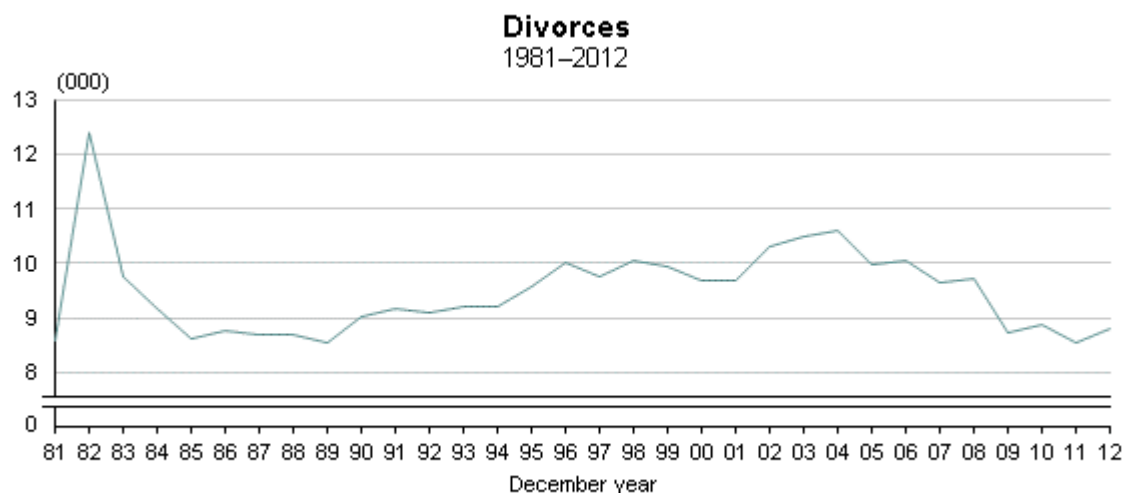
People entering into civil unions in 2012 were, on average, younger than in 2005. In 2005, the median age of people entering into a civil union was 40.3 for men and 40.8 for women. In 2012, the median age was 35.2 for men and 35.7 for women.

Divorce rate was 10.1 in 2012

In 2012, the Family Court granted 8,785 divorces. For every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand in 2012, there were 10.1 divorces.

In 1981, the number of divorces rose sharply following 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 12,395 in 1982. Subsequently, the number fell to a low of 8,555 in 1989 before increasing to a high of 10,609 in 2004. Since then there has been a decline in the number of divorces. Between 2009 and 2012 there were, on average, 8,737 divorces each year.

The trend in age at divorce is still upward. This partly reflects the marked trend toward later marriages, which started in the early 1970s. The median age at divorce in 2012 was 45.7 years for men and 43.2 years for women, compared with 42.4 years and 39.8 years, respectively, in 2002.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

As with marriages, people in civil unions can dissolve their union after they have been separated for two years. Up to 31 December 2012, 124 civil unions had been dissolved in New Zealand. There are an insufficient number of civil unions to compare the proportion of civil unions being dissolved with the proportion of marriages ending in divorce.

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 (35 percent) of New Zealanders who married in 1987 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). This compares with 30 percent for those who married in 1977, and 26 percent for those who married in 1967.

First same-sex marriages soon to be celebrated in New Zealand

The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act 2013 defines marriage as the union of two people, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The first same-sex marriage ceremonies could take place on 19 August 2013. Statistics NZ is currently working on changes needed to meet new data requirements arising from this Act.

Provisional civil union and marriage data

Provisional data on civil unions and marriages for the March 2013 quarter is now available. [Civil Unions and Marriages \(Provisional\)](#) tables are released quarterly. Data for the June quarter will be available on 5 August 2013, and for the September quarter on 5 November.

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.

Divorce: the dissolution of a marriage. An application for marriage dissolution can be made by either the husband or wife on the grounds that the marriage has broken down irreconcilably, provided a two-year separation requirement is satisfied. Orders for dissolution of marriage cannot be granted if both marriage partners live outside New Zealand.

Divorce statistics provide information on orders for dissolution of marriage granted in New Zealand. From 2011, divorce statistics are based on the year the order of dissolution of marriage 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 rate: the number of divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand.

General marriage rate: the number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over.

Marriage: the act, ceremony, or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted. In New Zealand, a 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.

Marriage statistics from 1991 are based on the number of marriages registered in New Zealand of bridegrooms 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.

Related links

Upcoming releases

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2013 will be released on 5 May 2014.

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Past releases

[Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces](#) has links to past releases.

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Data quality

This section contains information that does not change between releases.

- [Data source](#)
- [Geographical information](#)
- [Confidentiality](#)
- [More information](#)

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 granted in New Zealand. The data is compiled from information collected by the family courts.

Geographical information

Marriages are available by territorial authority (city and district council).

Civil unions 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 prohibits a more detailed geographic breakdown.

Court is the only field giving a geographic breakdown of where divorces actually occur in New Zealand. 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.

More information

[See more on marriages data](#)

[See more on civil unions data](#)

[See more on divorce data](#)

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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 marriage rates, 1977–2012
2. Median age at marriage by previous marital status, 1983–2012
3. Divorces and divorce rates, 1977–2012
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce, 1990–2012
5. Divorces involving people with children aged under 17 years, 1993–2012
6. Civil unions by relationship type, 2005–12

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**