

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2016

Embargoed until 10:45am – 03 May 2017

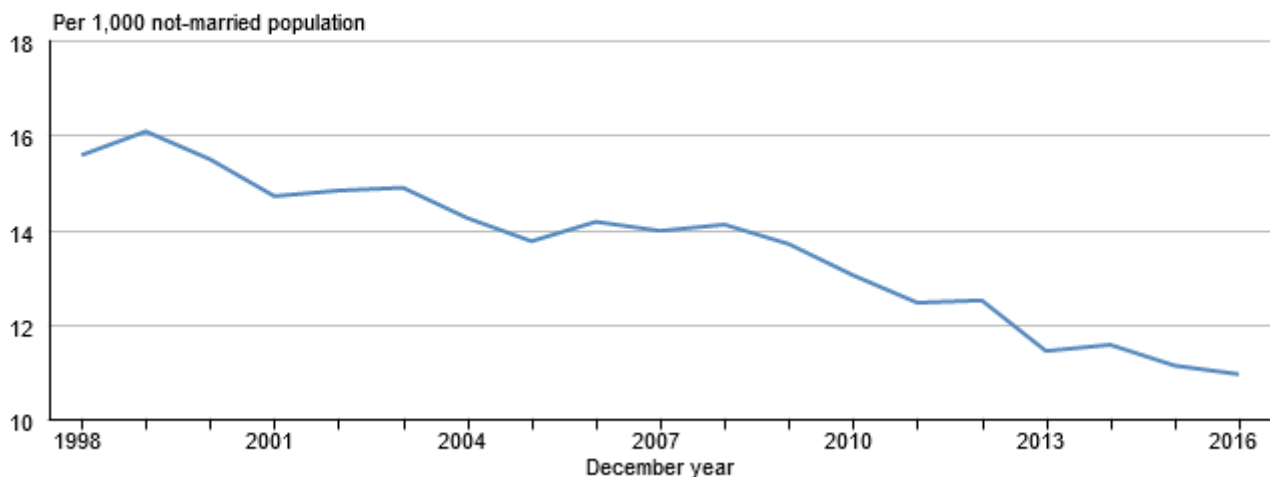
Key facts

In 2016:

Marriages and civil unions

- 20,235 marriages and civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents – of these, 483 were same-sex marriages or civil unions.
- 14,328 were first marriages and civil unions; 5,865 were remarriages and civil unions; and 42 couples (both same-sex and opposite-sex) transferred from a civil union to a marriage or vice versa.
- The general marriage rate was 10.9 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 2,961 marriages or civil unions were registered to overseas residents – of these, 471 were same-sex marriages or civil unions.

General marriage rate
1998–2016

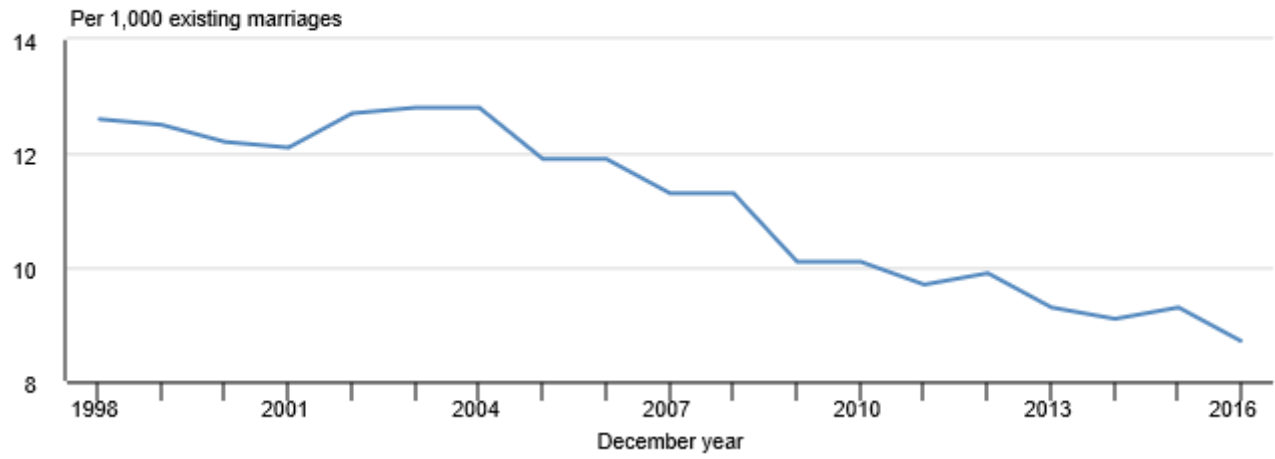


Divorces

- 8,100 married and 69 civil union couples were granted divorces in New Zealand.
- There were 8.7 divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages and civil unions.

Divorce rate

1998–2016



Source: Stats NZ

Liz MacPherson, Government Statistician
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Commentary

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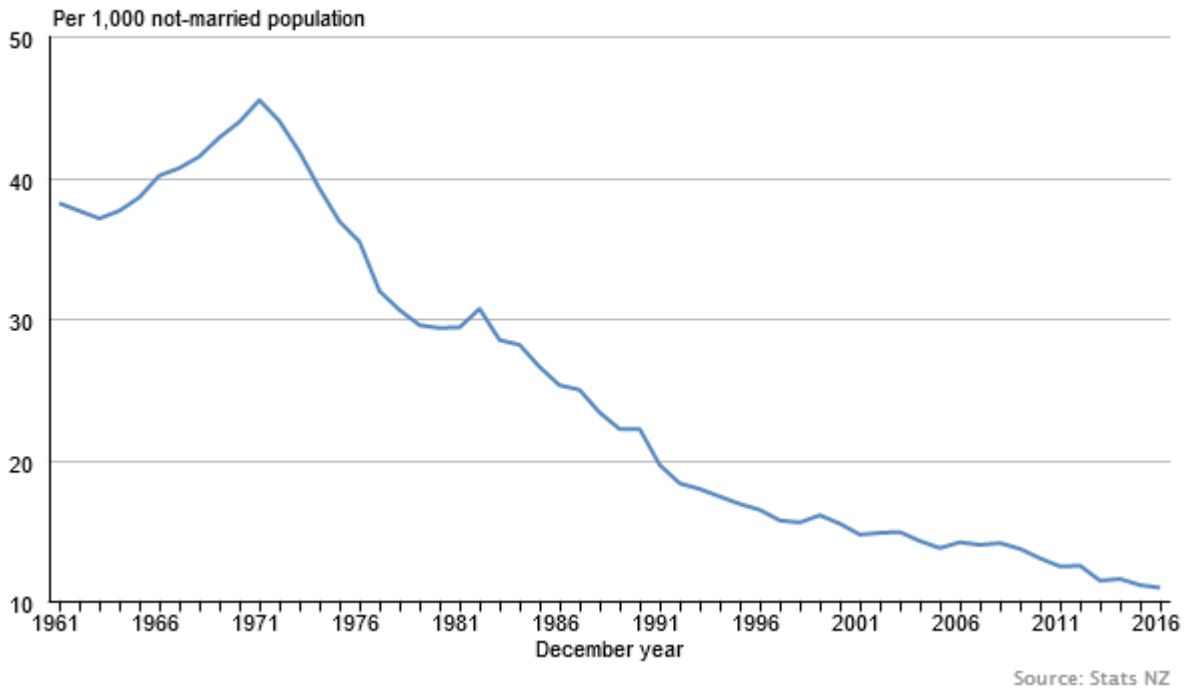
Slight increase in number of marriages and civil unions in 2016

New Zealand residents registered 20,235 marriages and civil unions in the December 2016 year, up slightly from 19,947 in 2015. This was the highest number of marriages and civil unions since 2012, when there were 20,823. There were slightly fewer marriages and civil unions registered in 2016 than the average over the last ten years. Between 2006 and 2015, the annual number of resident marriages and civil unions averaged 20,994.



The general marriage rate (number of marriages and civil unions per 1,000 people aged 16 years and over who are not married or in a civil union) was 10.9 in 2016. This is around one-quarter of the 1971 peak, when the rate reached 45.5.

General marriage rate
1961–2016



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 2016, 19,752 opposite-sex and 483 same-sex resident couples married or formed a civil union. Among same-sex couples, more female (309) than male (174) 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.

More opposite-sex civil unions than same-sex

For the third consecutive year, more opposite-sex couples registered a civil union than same-sex couples in 2016. Around 7 in every 10 civil unions registered in 2016 were to opposite-sex couples, with a similar proportion in 2015, 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 a year in 2006 to 2013, to 33 in 2016. Same-sex civil unions have dropped even more significantly, down from over 200 each year from 2005 to 2012, to 18 in 2016.

Half of same-sex couples marrying are from overseas

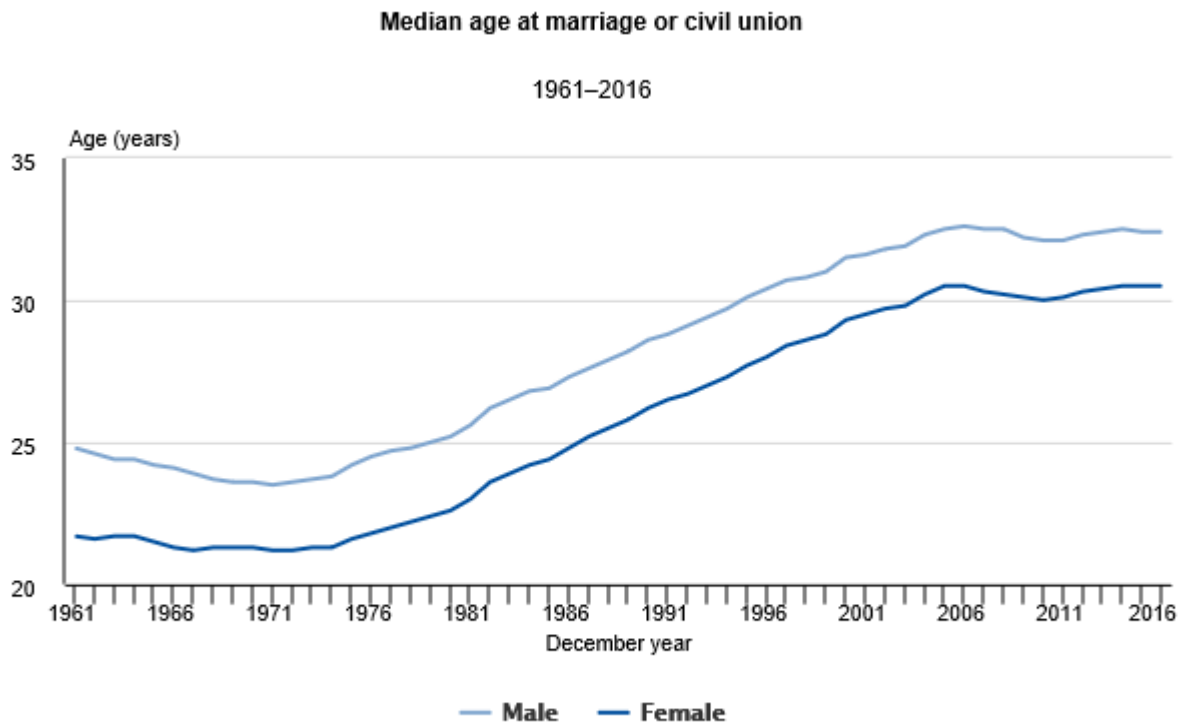
In 2016, 2,961 marriages and civil unions were registered to overseas residents. Of these, 471 were same-sex couples, and 2,490 were opposite-sex couples. Overseas residents made up half of all same-sex couples marrying or forming civil unions in New Zealand in 2016.

Of opposite-sex couples travelling here to marry, 56 percent had one or both partners born in New Zealand, compared with 21 percent of same-sex couples.

New Zealanders marrying later in life

New Zealanders are marrying later than in the past. In 2016, the median age at first marriage or civil union was 30.3 years for men and 29.0 years for women, compared with 28.1 and 26.1 in 1996. 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 32.4 years for men and 30.5 years for women in 2016.

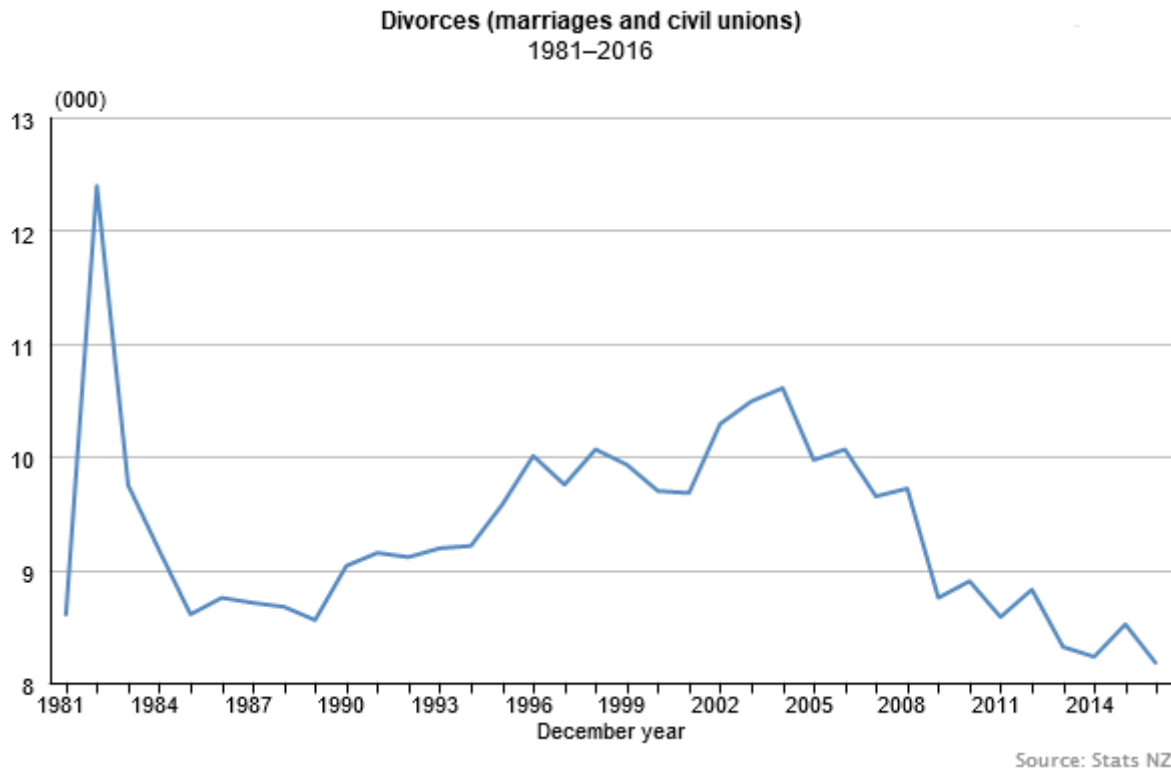


Source: Stats NZ

8,100 married couples and 69 civil union couples divorced in 2016

In 2016, the Family Court granted 8,100 married couples and 69 civil union couples a divorce. This is equivalent to 8.7 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 2016 (including the dissolution of couples from both marriages and civil unions) was 46.8 years for men and 44.4 years for women, compared with 43.9 years and 41.4 years in 2006.

Just over 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 (38 percent) of New Zealanders who married in 1991 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). This compares with 34 percent for those who married in 1981, and 29 percent for those who married in 1971.

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.'

Find data tables

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

Related links

- [Next release](#)
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Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2017 will be released in May 2018.

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Past releases

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Data quality

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 divorce statistics, and related metadata.

Marriage concepts – DataInfo+

Definitions of terms used in this release.

Civil Union concepts – DataInfo+

Definitions of terms used in this release.

Divorce concepts – DataInfo+

Definitions of terms used in this release.

Relationship Type concepts – DataInfo+

Definitions of terms used in this release.

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 Stats NZ Methodological Standard for Reporting of Data Quality.

Related information

[Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces](#) has links to reports, articles, and further information.

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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 previous legal relationship status
3. Divorces and divorce rates (marriages and civil unions)
4. Median duration of marriages and civil unions, 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 area of residence, year ended December 2016

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**

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