

# Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2013

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## Key facts

In 2013:

### Marriages

- 19,237 marriages were registered to New Zealand residents – of these, 209 were same-sex marriages.
- There were 13,312 first marriages, 5,825 remarriages, and 100 couples (both same-sex and opposite-sex) who transferred their civil union to a marriage.
- The general marriage rate was 10.9 marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over.
- An additional 2,416 marriages were registered to overseas residents – of these, 146 were same-sex marriages.

### Divorces

- 8,279 married couples were granted divorces in New Zealand.
- There were 9.4 divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages.

### Civil unions

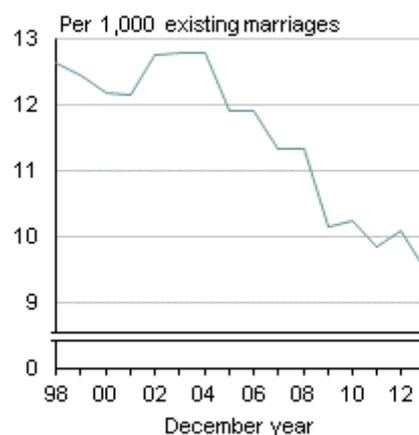
- 187 civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents – of these, 121 were same-sex unions.
- 46 civil unions were registered to overseas residents.
- 40 couples dissolved their civil union.

**General marriage rate**  
1998–2013



Source: Statistics New Zealand

**Divorce rate**  
1998–2013



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Liz MacPherson, Government Statistician  
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## Commentary

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### New Zealand defines marriage

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.

All couples (same-sex and opposite-sex) can choose to enter into either a marriage or a civil union. Couples in a civil union can now transfer their civil union to a marriage without first dissolving the civil union. Married couples can transfer their marriage to a civil union without first dissolving the marriage.

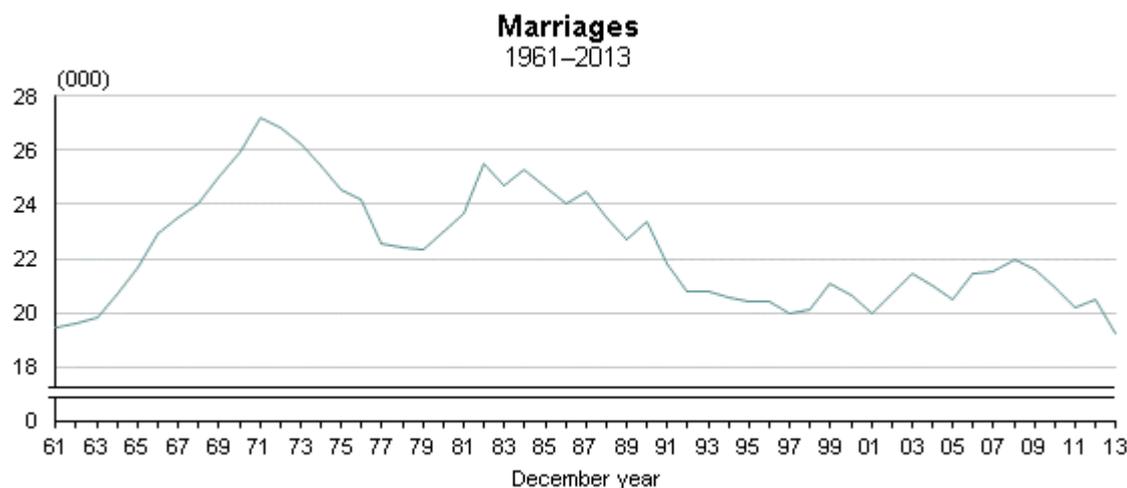
As a result of these changes, we have started a review of our marriage, civil union, and divorce statistics. We have introduced some new [tables](#) in this information release and in [Infoshare](#). For example, we have included information on same-sex and opposite-sex marriages by broad geographic areas.

We have changed some [definitions](#). For example, remarriages no longer include transfers from civil unions, but are now included in total marriages.

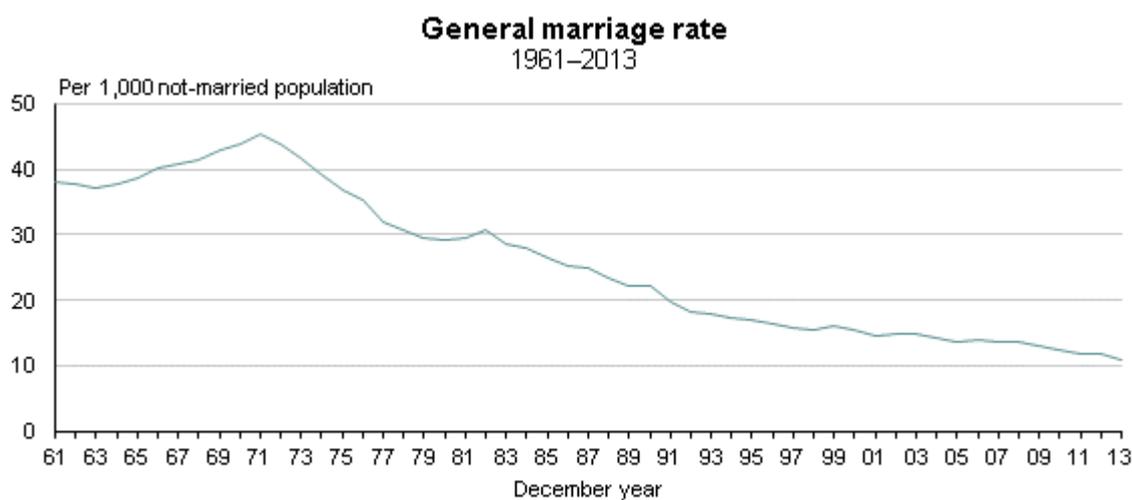
We will continue to review marriage, civil union, and divorce data as trends emerge.

### Fewer New Zealand residents tie the knot

New Zealand residents registered 19,237 marriages in the December 2013 year down from 20,521 in 2012. Between 2003 and 2012, the annual number of resident marriages averaged 21,108.



The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) was 10.9 in 2013. This is less than one-quarter of the 1971 peak, when the rate reached 45.5.



In 2013, 19,028 opposite-sex and 209 same-sex resident couples married. Among same-sex couples, more female (125) than male (84) couples married. This is consistent with resident civil unions. More female than male couples have registered civil unions in each year since civil unions were introduced in 2005.

Of the 19,237 resident marriages in 2013, 100 were couples who transferred their civil union to a marriage. Most (about 9 out of 10) were same-sex couples.

## Two in five same-sex couples marrying in New Zealand are from overseas

In 2013, 2,416 marriages were registered to overseas residents. Of those, 146 were same-sex couples and 2,270 were opposite-sex couples. Overseas residents made up 41 percent of all same-sex couples marrying in New Zealand in 2013.

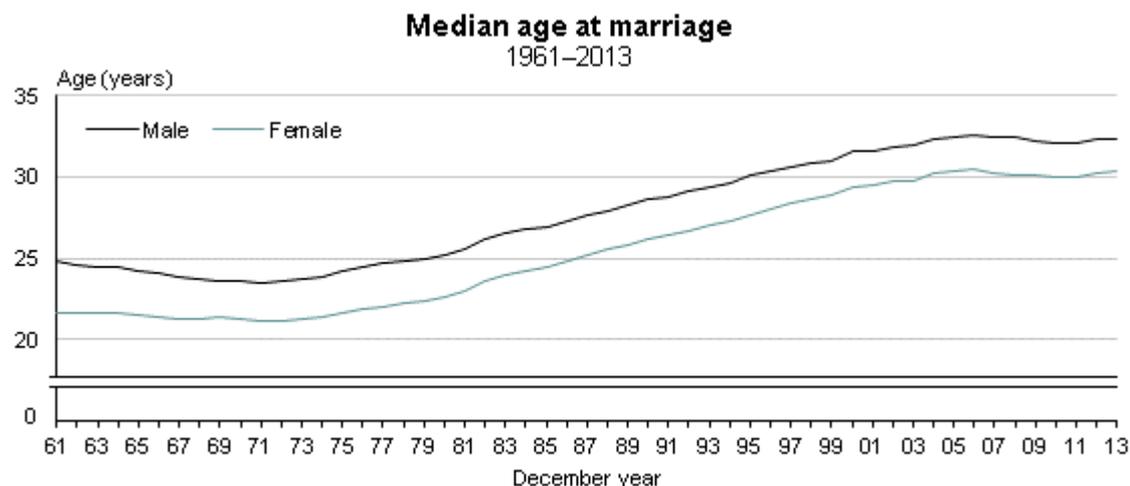
Most couples coming here to marry came from across the ditch – 58 percent of opposite-sex and 65 percent of same-sex couples were from Australia.

Sixty-three percent (1,427) of opposite-sex couples travelling here to marry had one or both partners born in New Zealand, compared with 25 percent of same-sex couples.

## New Zealanders marrying later in life

New Zealanders are marrying later than in the past. In 2013, the median age at first marriage was 30.1 years for men and 28.6 years for women – up from 27.3 and 25.2 years in 1993. 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 30.4 years for women in 2013.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

## Same-sex civil unions drop by nearly one-half in 2013

Same-sex civil unions nearly halved in 2013, following the introduction of same-sex marriages in August. Resident same-sex couples registered 121 civil unions in 2013, down from 235 in 2012. The number of opposite-sex couples registering a civil union in 2013 (66) was similar to the annual average for 2006–2012 (70).

An additional 46 couples travelled to New Zealand to register a civil union in 2013, down from 87 in 2012. Between 2006 and 2013 most (nearly 9 out of 10) couples coming to New Zealand for a civil union have been same-sex couples, with a relatively even split between female and male couples.

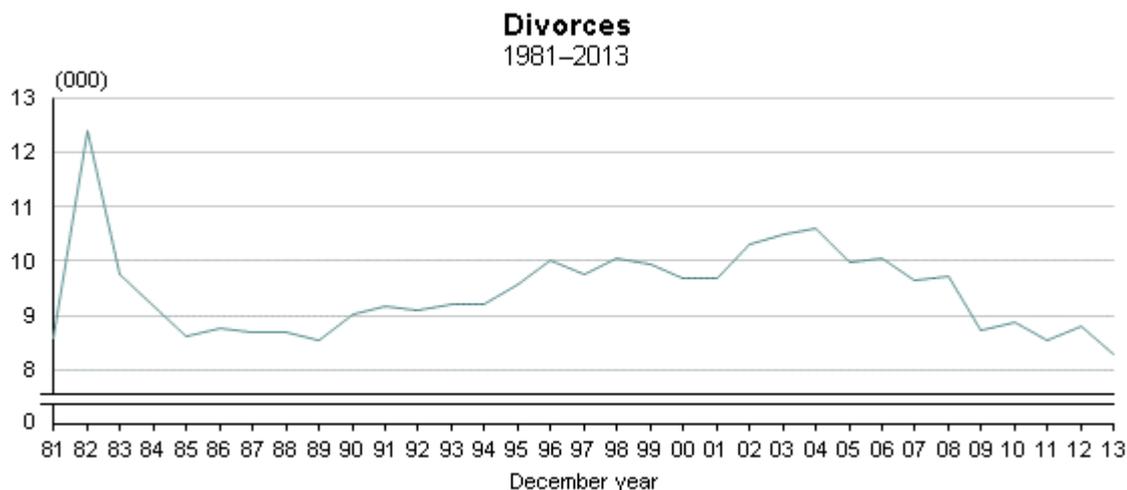
## Divorce rate was 9.4 in 2013

In 2013, the Family Court granted 8,279 divorces. For every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand in 2013, there were 9.4 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 2013 there were, on average, 8,645 divorces each year.

The trend in age at divorce is still moving upward. This partly reflects the marked trend toward later marriages, which started in the early 1970s. The median age at divorce in 2013 was 46.4 years for men and 43.8 years for women, compared with 42.5 years and 40.1 years, in 2003.

Couples are also staying married longer before divorcing. The median duration of marriages ending in divorce increased by just over one year between 2003 and 2013 – up from 13.1 years in 2003 to 14.2 in 2013. This will also have contributed to the increase in the median age at divorce.



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 2013, 164 civil unions had been dissolved in New Zealand. There is 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 1988 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). This compares with 32 percent for those who married in 1978, and 26 percent for those who married in 1968.

## Provisional civil union and marriage data

Provisional data on civil unions and marriages for the March 2014 quarter is now available. [Civil unions and marriages \(provisional\)](#) tables are released quarterly. Provisional data for the June 2014 quarter will be available on 5 August 2014, and for the September 2014 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.

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. 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.

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.

Because of the small number of civil union dissolutions, the only information currently available is the total number of dissolution orders of civil unions granted to date.

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

**Divorce rate:** the number of divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand.

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

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

**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.

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

## **Related links**

### **Upcoming releases**

*Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2014* will be released in May 2015.

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[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

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

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.

Same-sex and opposite-sex marriages combined are available by territorial authority (city and district council) from [Infoshare](#).

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
2. Median age at marriage by previous marital status
3. Divorces and divorce rates
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce
5. Divorces 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 2013

## 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**