

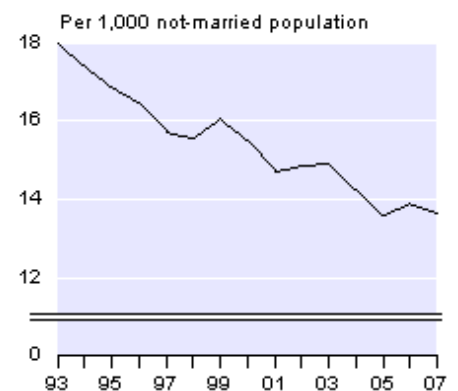
Embargoed until 10:45am – 6 May 2008

Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ended December 2007

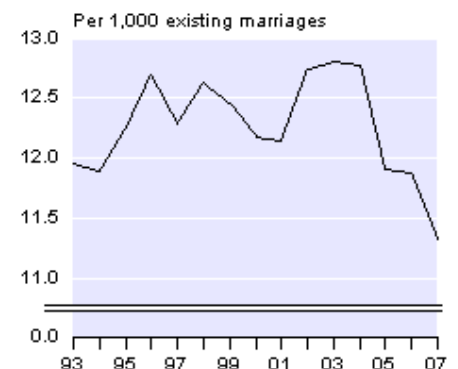
Highlights

- There were 21,500 resident marriages registered in New Zealand during the December 2007 year.
- There were 2,000 marriages registered to overseas residents in 2007.
- The general marriage rate was 13.6 marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over in 2007.
- There were 316 resident civil unions registered in 2007, of which 80 percent were same-sex unions.
- There were 77 civil unions registered to overseas residents in 2007.
- There were 9,600 orders for dissolution of marriage granted in New Zealand during the December 2007 year.
- There were 11.3 divorces for every 1,000 married couples in 2007.

General Marriage Rate
1993–2007



Divorce Rate
1993–2007



Geoff Bascand
Government Statistician

6 May 2008
ISSN 1178-055X

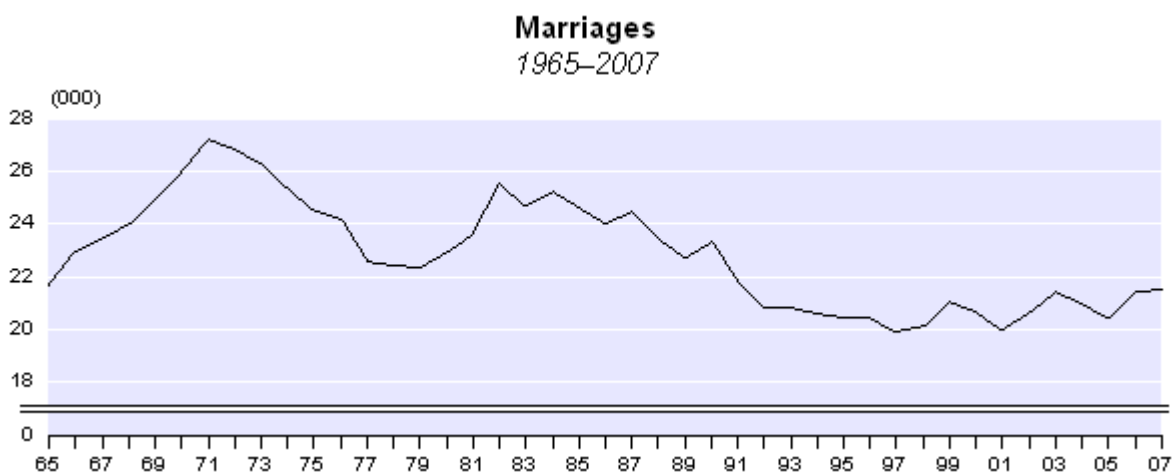
There is a companion Media Release published – [Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ended December 2007](#).

Commentary

Total marriages

There were 21,500 marriages registered to New Zealand residents in the December 2007 year, compared with 21,400 in 2006 and 20,500 in 2005. In addition, 2,000 marriages were registered to overseas residents in each year from 2005 to 2007.

Over the last decade, the annual average number of resident marriages has been around 20,800. This compares with an annual average of 25,200 during the period 1968–1977.



While the number of marriages has been relatively stable over the last decade, the marriage rate has fallen. The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) declined from 15.7 per 1,000 in 1997 to 13.6 per 1,000 in 2007. The current rate is less than one-third of the peak of 45.5 per 1,000 recorded in 1971. 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 increasing numbers of New Zealanders remaining single.

Date of marriage

The warmer months of January, February and March remain the most popular months for marriages. In the December 2007 year, 43 percent of marriages were celebrated in the first three months of the year. The most popular day of the week to wed is Saturday, followed by Friday. The most popular day of 2007 was Saturday 24 February, with 610 marriages celebrated. On Wednesday 14 February 2007 (Valentine's Day) around 70 couples married, more than three times the average number (20) of weddings for the other Wednesdays in February. When Valentine's Day fell on a Saturday in 1998 and 2004, there were 780 and 660 weddings respectively. Valentine's Day falls on a Saturday again in 2009.

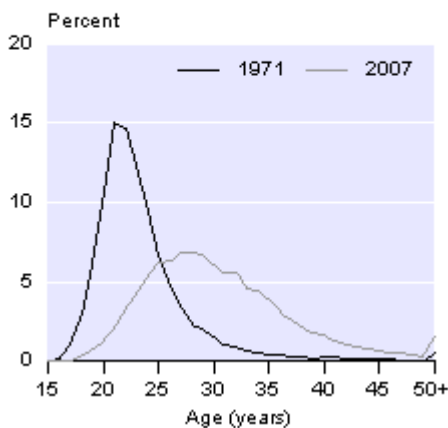
In contrast, only 13 percent of marriages registered in 2007 took place in June, July and August. However, one day within these winter months was popular with marrying couples – 290 marriages were celebrated on Saturday 7 July 2007, or 07/07/07, compared with an average of 80 marriages in the other Saturdays in July. This date may have been popular because the number seven is considered lucky by some cultures or individuals, or because the date is easy to remember.

Age at first marriage

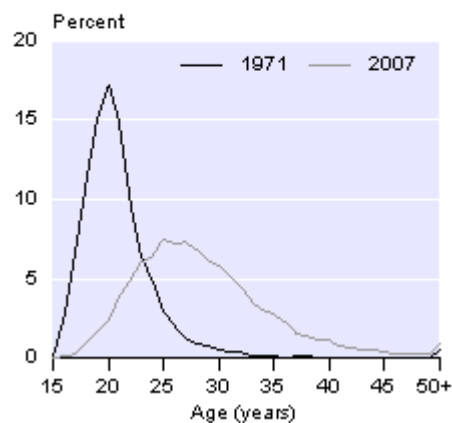
New Zealanders are marrying later than in the past. In 2007, the median age at first marriage was 29.9 and 28.1 years for men and women, respectively – up from 28.3 and 26.5 years in 1997. Although age at first marriage has increased over the decade, most of the increase occurred before 2004. In 1971, when marriage rates peaked, the median age of first marriage was 23.0 years for men and 20.8 years for women. Now, fewer New Zealanders are marrying in their teens or early twenties. In 1971, 62 percent of men and 52 percent of women marrying for the first time were aged between 20 and 24 years, compared with 16 and 24 percent for men and women, respectively, in 2007. In 2007, 500 teenage women married, compared with 8,700 in 1971. Teenagers comprised 36 percent of women who married for the first time in 1971, but only 3 percent in 2007.

Women still tend to marry men older than themselves, but the gap between their median ages at first marriage has narrowed. In 1967, this gap averaged 2.5 years, but by 2007 it had narrowed to 1.8 years.

Age Distribution of First Marriages: Men
1971 and 2007



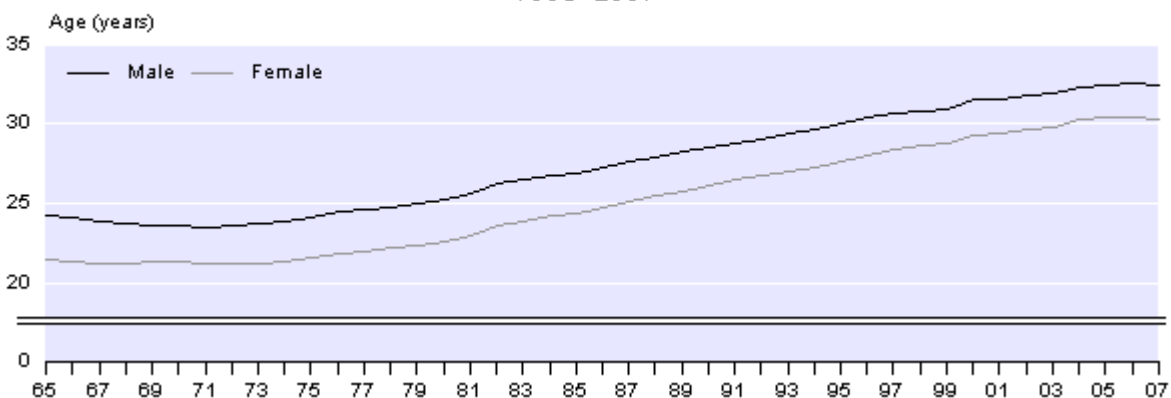
Age Distribution of First Marriages: Women
1971 and 2007



Age at marriage

Among all marriages (first marriages and remarriages), the median age at marriage has risen steadily since the early 1970s. Median age at marriage reached historic lows of 23.5 years for men and 21.2 years for women in 1971, before rising to 32.5 years for men and 30.2 years for women in 2007. These median ages have been relatively constant since 2004.

Median Age at Marriage
1965–2007



New Zealand men and women are now marrying, on average, nine years later than in 1971, and 1.8 years later than in 1997. The trend towards older age at marriage has also occurred in a number of other countries. In Australia, the median age at marriage for men rose from 27 years in 1986 to 32 years in 2006 and from 25 to 29 years for women. In England and Wales, the median age for men increased from 28 years in 1991 to 34 years in 2006 and from 26 to 31 years for women.

Remarriages

The number of New Zealand resident marriages where one or both partners had previously been married was 7,100 in 2007, down from 7,300 in both 2005 and 2006. The proportion of remarriages remained stable at around 36 percent of all marriages between 1995 and 2005, but dropped slightly to 34 percent in 2006 and 33 percent in 2007 due to an increase in first marriages. In 1971, just 16 percent of marriages involved the remarriage of one or both partners.

About 90 percent of those remarrying in 2007 were divorced, up from 67 percent in 1971. This rise can be partly attributed to the increase in the number of people who are divorced. In 1971, only 4 percent of not-married people were divorced; in 2007, the corresponding figure was 16 percent. Twenty-three percent of men and 21 percent of women who married in 2007 were previously divorced. About half of divorced people who remarry marry another divorced person.

In 2007, the median ages of divorced and widowed men remarrying were 46.1 and 63.1 years, respectively, while the median ages of divorced and widowed women remarrying were 42.9 and 55.9 years, respectively.

De facto unions

A growing proportion of New Zealanders, like their counterparts in Australia, North America and Europe, live together without legalising or formalising their union. The five-yearly Census of Population and Dwellings is the primary source of information on de facto unions. Marriage statistics only provide information on legally registered marriages. In 1996, about three in every 20 men and women aged 15 years and over who were in partnerships were not legally married. By 2006, this figure had increased to around four in 20. The proportion of partnered people who are not legally married decreases with age. Among partnered people aged 15–44 years, 35 percent were not legally married in 2006. This compares with 10 percent for partnered men and women aged 45 years and over. Among partnered women aged 15–19 years, nine out of 10 were living in a de facto union at the time of the 2006 Census.

Civil unions

The Civil Union Act 2004 came into force on 26 April 2005 and the first ceremonies were celebrated on 29 April 2005. This Act introduced a new form of legal relationship. Two people aged 18 years and over, whether of opposite or the same sex, can enter into a civil union provided they are not currently married to, or in a civil union with, someone else. As with marriages, people aged 16 and 17 years must have their guardian's consent to enter a civil union. A couple who are currently married can transfer their relationship to a civil union. An opposite-sex couple in a civil union can transfer their relationship to a marriage. As in the past, a same-sex couple cannot enter into a marriage.

In 2007, 316 civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents. These comprised 253 same-sex unions (103 male and 150 female) and 63 opposite-sex unions. There were no transfers to a civil union from marriage and three transfers to a marriage from a civil union. In addition, 77 civil unions were registered to overseas residents, making a total of 393 registrations. One in five civil unions involved overseas residents in 2007, compared with roughly one in 10 marriages.

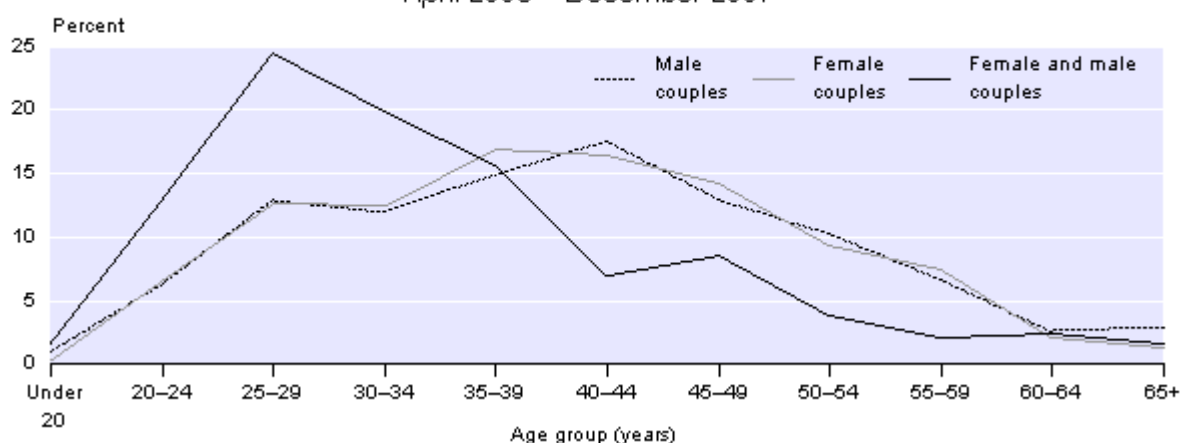
Same-sex relationships have been legally recognised in Scandinavian countries for some years. Denmark introduced 'registered partnerships' in October 1989, with Norway and Sweden following suit in the mid-1990s and Finland in 2002. Since New Zealand introduced civil unions in April 2005, a number of other countries, for example, the United Kingdom, have adopted this approach. Some countries, such as Spain, Canada and South Africa, have extended the right to marry to same-sex couples. There is no provision for registration of same-sex partnerships in Australia, although same-sex couples in a de facto relationship are awarded the same rights as opposite-sex de facto couples in many states. Although some countries have legal registration of same-sex unions, legal rights and requirements vary across countries.

Demographic characteristics of civil unions

As there are relatively small numbers of civil unions registered annually, all resident civil unions registered in New Zealand from April 2005 to December 2007 have been included in this analysis. Same-sex couples registering civil unions are, on average, roughly eight years older than opposite-sex couples. The median age of men registering a same-sex civil union was 41 years, and women, 40 years. The median ages for opposite-sex civil unions were 34 years for men and 32 years for women – slightly older than the median age for marriage (32 and 30 years, respectively). The older age profile of same-sex civil unions probably reflects the fact that they have only recently been able to register their relationships, while opposite-sex couples could marry.

Age Distribution of Civil Unions

April 2005 – December 2007



Opposite-sex civil unions tend to be concentrated in the younger age groups; 44 percent were aged 25–34 years and only 26 percent were aged 40 years and over. Same-sex civil unions had a broader age range. The 35–39 year and 40–44 year age groups were the most common, but these represented just 33 percent of those registering a same-sex civil union. Over half (52 percent) of men and women in same-sex civil unions were aged 40 years and over.

The proportion of civil unions where one or both partners had previously been married is higher for same-sex female couples than same-sex male couples. In 35 percent of same-sex female civil unions, one or both partners had previously been married. In 25 percent of same-sex male civil unions, one or both partners had previously been married. The proportion for opposite-sex couples (33 percent) is the same as the proportion of remarriages.

Because civil union registrations are relatively new, the current age and previous marital status characteristics may not reflect long-term trends.

Provisional quarterly civil unions and marriages

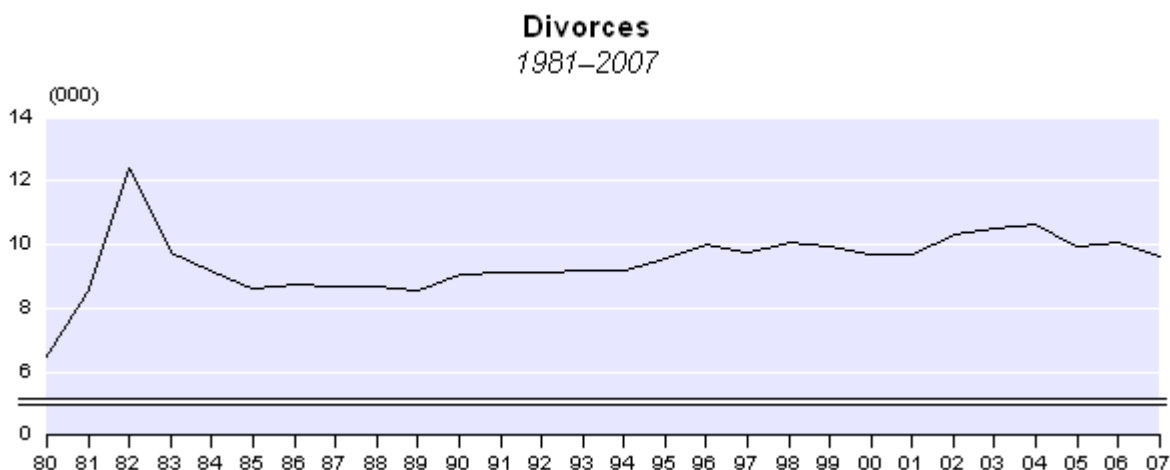
There have been 1,249 civil unions registered between April 2005 and March 2008. These comprised 1,016 same-sex unions (449 male and 567 female), 231 opposite-sex unions and 2 transfers from marriage. These registrations include New Zealand residents and overseas visitors. Figures for January 2008–March 2008 are provisional.

Provisional quarterly civil unions and marriages statistics are available on the Statistics New Zealand website. This data will be updated within five weeks of the end of the quarter.

Total 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 12,400 in 1982. Subsequently, the number fell to a low of 8,600 in 1989. In 2007, the Family Court granted 9,600 divorces, slightly below the annual average of 10,000 for the last decade.

As with marriages, people in civil unions can dissolve their union after they have been living apart for two years, so potentially a civil union registered in 2005 could have been legally dissolved in 2007. However, no civil unions registered in New Zealand were dissolved in 2007.



Divorce rate

For every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand in 2007, there were 11.3 divorces. This is similar to the 2006 rate of 11.9 divorces per 1,000 estimated existing marriages. New Zealand's divorce rate is comparable with Australia (12.0 for women and 12.2 for men in 2006) and England and Wales (12.2 in 2006).

Duration of marriage of those divorcing

Couples who had been married for 5–9 years accounted for a quarter of all divorces in 2007. The next most common marriage duration before divorce was 10–14 years (18 percent), followed by 15–19 years (15 percent). Thirteen percent of people divorcing had been married for four years or less.

Half of marriages dissolved in 2007 had lasted 13.4 years or more, compared with the median duration of 12.6 years for marriages dissolved in 1997.

Age of divorcees

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 2007 was 44.3 years for men and 41.6 years for women. Divorcees in 2007 were, on average, about four years older than those whose marriages dissolved in 1997. The median ages then were 40.6 years for men and 37.9 years for women.

Marriages ending 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 about one-third of New Zealanders who married in 1982 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). For those married in 1977 and 1967, the corresponding figures were 30 and 26 percent, respectively.

Divorces involving people with children

Less than half of all marriages dissolved in 2007 involved people with children (under 17 years). The proportion of divorces involving children fell from 48 percent in 1997 to 45 percent in 2007. The number of divorces involving children was 4,700 in 1997 and 4,300 in 2007. Fewer children were involved in 2007 (7,800) than in 1997 (9,100).

Of those divorces involving children in 2007, there was an average of 1.8 children per divorce. There has been little change in this figure during the past decade. Less than half (46 percent) of children involved were under 10 years of age in 2007.

Additional tables

[Additional tables for marriages and civil unions](#), and [additional tables for divorces](#) can be found on the Statistics New Zealand site.

Final figures

The numbers of civil unions, marriages and divorces stated in this release are final. Due to a revision of processing systems, there have been changes in the territorial authorities of bridegrooms for 2006, resulting in a revision of resident marriage numbers for 2006. Total (resident and non-resident) marriage numbers remain the same. Similarly, resident civil union numbers have been revised for 2005 and 2006, with total (resident and non-resident) civil union numbers remaining unchanged.

Marriage and divorce rates for 2001–2006 have been revised using new 2006-based population estimates. The revised 2006-based rates are not comparable with the 2001-based rates published in previous Hot Off The Press releases. Marriage and divorce rates for the December 2007 year are provisional.

For technical information contact:
Anne Howard
Christchurch 03 964 8700
Email: demography@stats.govt.nz

Next release ...

Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ending December 2008 will be released on 5 May 2009.

Technical notes

Civil union statistics

Civil union statistics are based on the number of civil unions registered in New Zealand. A civil union involves the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of two people is constituted. A civil union may be entered into by couples of the same sex or by couples of different sexes. 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.

Divorce statistics

Divorce statistics provide information on orders for dissolution of marriage granted in New Zealand. 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.

De facto union (consensual union)

The definition of a de facto union is two people usually living in the same dwelling, but not in a registered marriage or civil union to each other, who: (a) share mutual concern for each other, (b) have a degree of economic, social and emotional interdependence, and (c) consider their relationship to be akin to marriage.

Marriage statistics

Marriage statistics are based on the number of marriages registered in New Zealand. A marriage involves the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife 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.

Resident population concept

This release refers to vital events (marriages, civil unions and divorces) registered in New Zealand by date of registration. It excludes people who normally reside overseas. Demographic rates are calculated using the mean estimated resident population.

Rounding

Marriage, civil union and divorce figures contained in the tables attached to this release are unrounded. All other figures have been rounded. Derived figures (for example, percentage annual increase and marriage rates) have been calculated using unrounded data.

More information

For more information on [marriages](#), [civil unions](#) or [divorces](#), follow the links from the Technical notes of this release on the Statistics New Zealand website.

Copyright

Information obtained from Statistics NZ may be freely used, reproduced, or quoted unless otherwise specified. In all cases Statistics NZ must be acknowledged as the source.

Liability

While care has been used in processing, analysing and extracting information, Statistics NZ gives no warranty that the information supplied is free from error. Statistics NZ shall not be liable for any loss suffered through the use, directly or indirectly, of any information, product or service.

Timing

Timed statistical releases are delivered using postal and electronic services provided by third parties. Delivery of these releases may be delayed by circumstances outside the control of Statistics NZ. Statistics NZ accepts no responsibility for any such delays.

Tables

The following tables are printed with this Hot Off The Press and can also be downloaded from the Statistics New Zealand website in Excel format. If you do not have access to Excel, you may use the [Excel file viewer](#) to view, print and export the contents of the file.

1. Marriages and marriage rates, 1961–2007
2. Median age at marriage, by previous marital status, 1961–2007
3. Divorces and divorce rates, 1961–2007
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce, 1987–2007
5. Divorces involving people with children aged under 17 years, 1987–2007
6. Civil unions, by relationship type, 2005–2007
7. Civil unions by age group, 2005–2007