

Embargoed until 10:45am – 05 May 2010

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ended December 2009

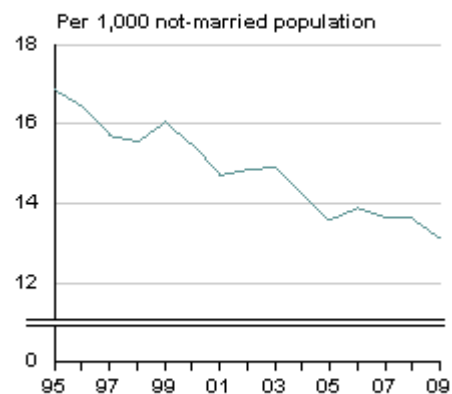
Highlights

In the December 2009 year:

- 21,600 marriages were registered to New Zealand residents.
- 2,100 marriages were registered to overseas residents.
- The general marriage rate was 13.2 marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over.
- 312 resident civil unions were registered, of which 78 percent were same-sex unions.
- 58 civil unions were registered to overseas residents.
- 8,700 orders for dissolution of marriage were granted in New Zealand.
- There were 10.2 divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages.

General marriage rate

1995–2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Divorce rate

1995–2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

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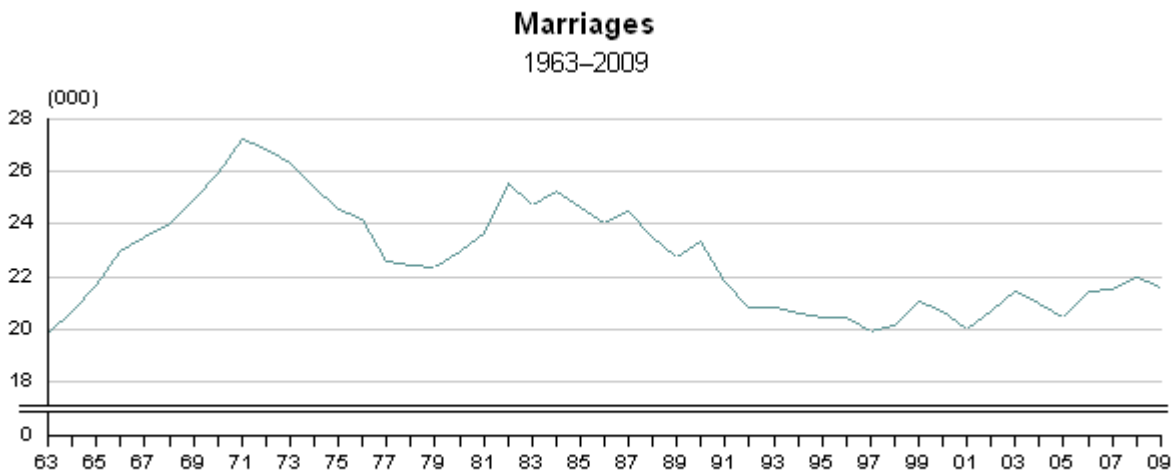
Commentary

Total marriages

There were 21,600 marriages registered to New Zealand residents in the December 2009 year, down 300 or 1 percent from 21,900 marriages in 2008. The decrease in the total number of resident marriages was due to a 5 percent decrease in the number of remarriages, from 7,100 in 2008 to 6,800 in 2009. A remarriage is when one or both partners have been previously married. The number of first marriages (that is, between two people who have never been married) remained unchanged from 2008, at 14,800.

A further 2,100 marriages were registered to overseas residents in 2009, similar to the 2,000 marriages registered to overseas residents in each of the previous four years.

Over the last decade, there have been an average of 21,000 resident marriages each year. This compares with an average annual number of 24,800 from 1970–79.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) was 13.2 per 1,000 in 2009, below the rate of 13.7 per 1,000 in 2008. The marriage rate has declined in the last decade from 16.1 per 1,000 in 1999 and is currently 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 2009, 41 percent of resident marriages were celebrated in the first three months of the year. The most popular day of the week to wed is Saturday, when about 60 percent of marriages were celebrated. As Valentine's Day fell on a Saturday in 2009, it was the most popular day to marry in 2009, with 600 registrations. The last two years that it fell on a Saturday were in 2004, when 660 marriages were registered, and in 1998, when a total of 780 marriages were celebrated. This compares with the 80 marriages registered on Valentine's Day in 2008, and 70 in 2007, both weekdays.

Another popular day to marry was Wednesday 9 September 2009, or 09/09/09, when 140 marriages were celebrated. This compared with an average of 11 marriages on other Wednesdays in September. This date may have been popular because the number nine is considered lucky by some cultures or because the date is easy to remember.

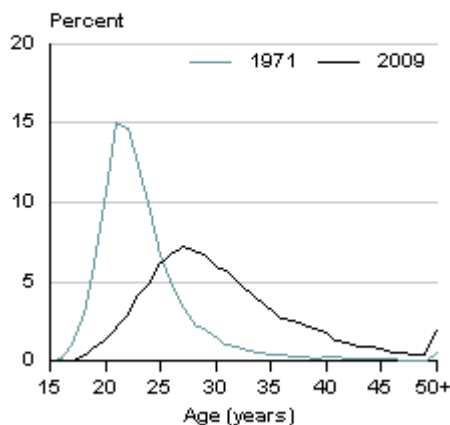
In contrast, only 12 percent of marriages registered in 2009 took place in the winter months of June, July, and August.

Age at first marriage

New Zealanders are marrying later than in the past. In 2009, the median age at first marriage was 29.8 and 28.1 years for men and women, respectively – up from 28.9 and 27.0 years in 1999. Although the median age at first marriage has increased over the decade, 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 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 20–24 years, compared with 16 and 23 percent for men and women, respectively, in 2009. Teenagers comprised 36 percent of women who married for the first time in 1971, but only 3 percent in 2009 when 590 teenage women married.

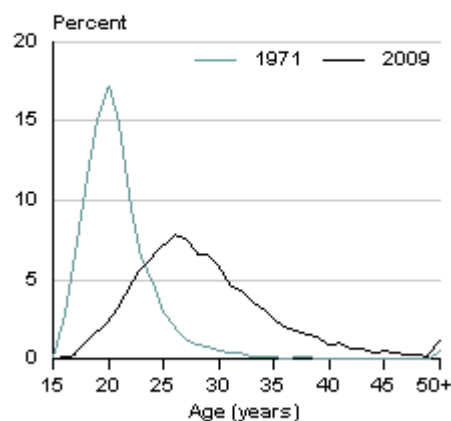
Women still tend to marry men older than themselves, but the gap between their median ages at first marriage has narrowed. In 1969, this gap averaged 2.1 years, but by 2009 it had narrowed to 1.7 years.

Age distribution of first marriages: men
1971 and 2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Age distribution of first marriages: women
1971 and 2009

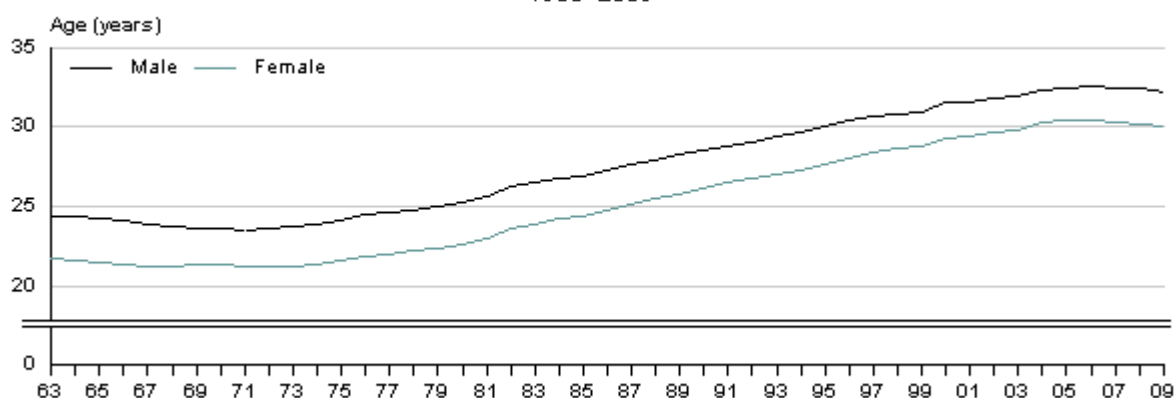


Source: Statistics New Zealand

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 32.2 years for men and 30.1 years for women in 2009. These median ages have been relatively constant since 2004.

Median age at marriage 1963–2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

New Zealand men and women are now marrying, on average, nine years later than in 1971. 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 28 years in 1989 to 32 years in 2008 and from 26 to 29 years for women. In England and Wales, the median age for men increased from 28 years in 1991 to 34 years in 2008 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 had dropped to 6,800 in 2009, down from 7,100 in 2008 and 2007. The proportion of all marriages that were remarriages in 2009 was 31 percent, the lowest since 1981. 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 and 2008. In 1971, just 16 percent of marriages involved the remarriage of one or both partners.

About 90 percent of those remarrying in 2009 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 2006, the corresponding figure was 16 percent (based on census data). Of all the New Zealand residents who married in 2009, 21 percent of men and 20 percent of women were previously divorced. About half of divorced people who remarry marry another divorced person.

In 2009, the median ages of divorced and widowed men remarrying were 47.3 and 63.4 years, respectively, while the median ages of divorced and widowed women remarrying were 43.7 and 57.4 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 1 in 7 adults (aged 15 years and over) who were in partnerships were not legally married. By 2006, this figure had increased to around 1 in 5. 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, 9 out of 10 were living in a de facto union at the time of the 2006 Census.

Civil unions

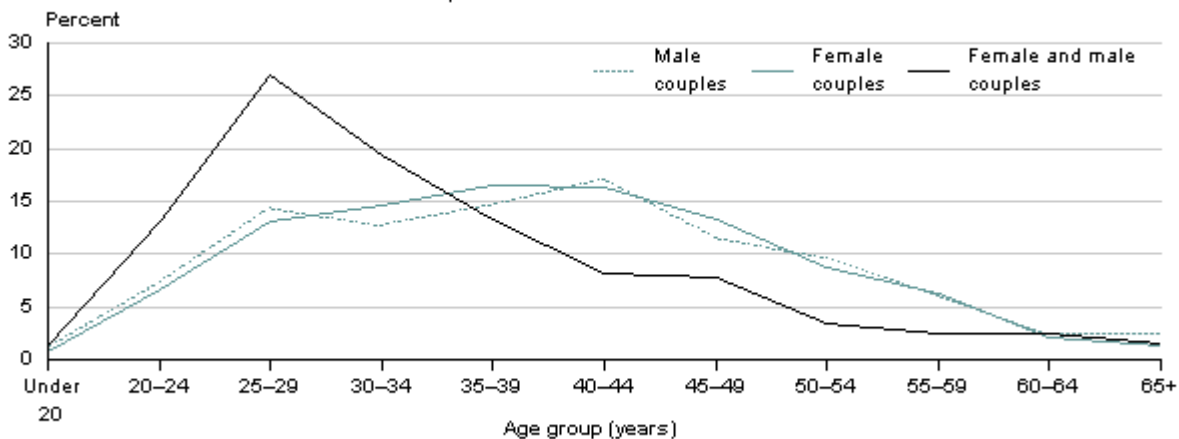
The Civil Union Act 2004 came into force on 26 April 2005 and the first ceremonies were celebrated on 29 April 2005. This Act introduced a new form of legal relationship. Two people aged 18 years and over, whether of opposite or the same sex, can enter into a civil union provided they are not currently 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. Although some other countries have legal registration of same-sex unions, legal rights and requirements vary.

In 2009, 312 civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents. These comprised 244 same-sex unions (97 male and 147 female) and 66 opposite-sex unions. There were two transfers to a civil union from marriage and 10 transfers to a marriage from a civil union. In addition, 58 civil unions were registered to overseas residents, bringing the total number of registrations to 370. About 1 in 6 civil unions involved overseas residents in 2009, compared with about 1 in 12 marriages.

Demographic characteristics of civil unions

As a relatively small number of civil unions are registered annually, all resident civil unions registered in New Zealand from April 2005 to December 2009 have been included in this analysis. Same-sex couples registering civil unions are, on average, about seven years older than opposite-sex couples. The median age of men registering a same-sex civil union was 40 years, while for women registering a same-sex civil union, the median age was 39. The median ages for opposite-sex civil unions were 33 years for men and 31 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 possibly 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 2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Opposite-sex civil unions tend to be concentrated in the younger age groups; 46 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 32 percent of those registering a same-sex civil union. Around half (49 percent) of men and women in same-sex civil unions were aged 40 years and over.

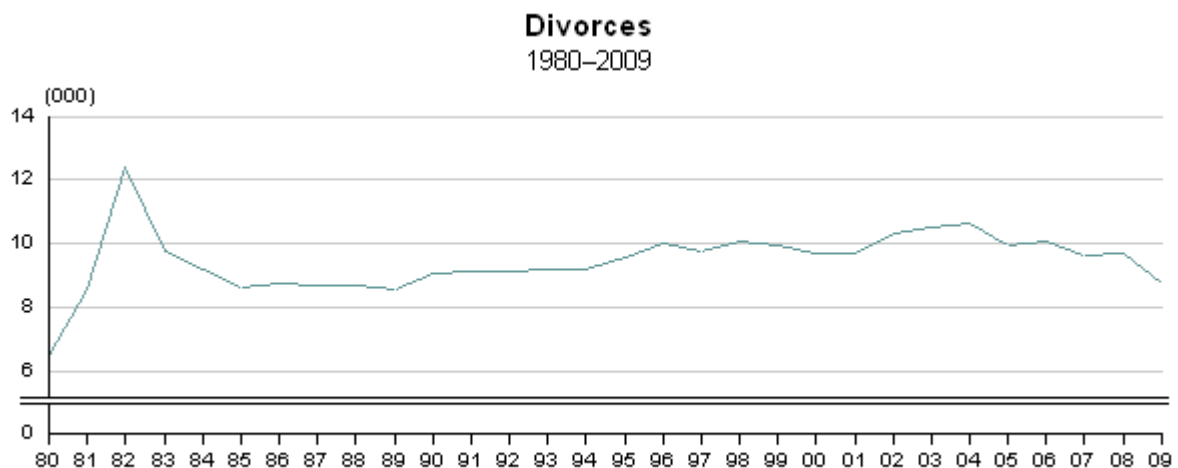
The proportion of civil unions where one or both partners had previously been married is higher for same-sex female couples (37 percent) than same-sex male couples (21 percent). In 29 percent of opposite-sex couples, one or both partners had previously been married.

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

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 2009, the Family Court granted 8,700 divorces, below the annual average of 10,000 between 1999 and 2008, and the lowest number of divorces since 1989. In 2008, divorces in England and Wales fell 5 percent from 2007. Divorces in Australia decreased 2 percent in the same period.

As with marriages, people in civil unions can dissolve their union after they have been separated for two years. Up to 31 December 2008, eight civil unions had been dissolved in New Zealand. In 2009, there were 16 dissolutions of civil unions. 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.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Divorce rate

For every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand in 2009, there were 10.2 divorces, down from 11.3 in 2008, and the lowest rate since 1980. New Zealand's divorce rate is lower than Australia (12.0 for women and 12.2 for men in 2006) and England and Wales (11.2 in 2008).

Duration of marriage of those divorcing

Couples who had been married for 5–9 years accounted for 26 percent of all divorces in 2009. The next most common marriage duration before divorce was 10–14 years (18 percent), followed by 15–19 years (14 percent). Eleven percent of people divorcing had been married for four years or less.

Half of marriages dissolved in 2009 had lasted 13.3 years or more, compared with the median duration of 12.8 years for marriages dissolved in 1999.

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 2009 was 44.9 years for men and 42.3 years for women. Divorcees in 2009 were, on average, about four years older than those whose marriages dissolved in 1999. The median ages then were 41.2 years for men and 38.4 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 1984 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). For those married in 1979 and 1969, the corresponding figures were 33 and 28 percent, respectively.

Divorces involving people with children

Less than half of all marriages dissolved in 2009 involved people with children (under 17 years). The proportion of divorces involving children fell from 48 percent in 1999 to 43 percent in 2009. The number of divorces involving children was 4,700 in 1999 and 3,700 in 2009. Fewer children were involved in 2009 (6,700) than in 1999 (8,900).

Of those divorces involving children in 2009, there was an average of 1.8 children per divorce. This figure has changed little during the past decade. Less than half (48 percent) of children involved were under 10 years of age in 2009.

Additional tables

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

Final figures

Marriage and divorce rates for 2009 are provisional. All other figures in this release are final.

Review of vitals outputs

Statistics NZ has completed a review of its vitals outputs (births, deaths, marriages, civil unions, and divorces). The purpose of the review was to ensure information remains relevant and easily accessible. As a result of this review, a number of changes have been made to the vitals data

available in [Infoshare](#). (Infoshare is a free online tool that provides access to a range of time series data.)

Three new subject groups have been created with revised content. The new groups are:

- Births – VSB (replaces Vital Statistics – Births – VTB)
- Deaths – VSD (replaces Vital Statistics – Deaths – VTD)
- Marriages, Civil unions, and Divorces – VSM (replaces Vital Statistics – Marriages – VTM).

The original vital statistics groups will remain available until 30 June 2010 to allow users time to familiarise themselves with the new groups.

The following subject groups have been renamed to more clearly indicate the content of the groups:

- Demography – Fertility Measures – DFM is now Birth Rates – DFM
- Demography – Mortality Measures – DMM is now Death Rates – DMM
- Demography – Marriage Rates – DMR is now Marriage and Divorce Rates – DMR.

Additional tables are also available. For further information see [Vitals data on Infoshare](#).

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Next release ...

Marriages, Civil Unions, and Divorces: Year ending December 2010 will be released on 4 May 2011.

Technical notes

Civil union statistics

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 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. Divorce statistics are based on date of receipt not date of occurrence.

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 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.

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.

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.

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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, 1974–2009
2. Median age at marriage by previous marital status, 1980–2009
3. Divorces and divorce rates, 1974–2009
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce, 1987–2009
5. Divorces involving people with children aged under 17 years, 1990–2009
6. Civil unions by relationship type, 2005–2009