Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales quality and methods guide

What the divorce and civil partnership dissolution statistics cover, how we produce them, and their quality and comparability. Includes definitions and latest, past and upcoming changes.

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1 . Overview

This guide provides quality and methods information for our Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales statistical article series.

We produce annual statistics on divorces and civil partnership dissolutions that take place in England and Wales. The records are created through the legal process and supplied to us by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). The statistics cover final orders and nullity orders granted during the reference year and include numbers and rates, by partnership type and duration of marriage or civil partnership.

The statistics do not measure couples who separate without legally ending their marriage or civil partnership. They are based on the date the final legal order is granted, not the date of separation or the date proceedings began.

These are accredited official statistics. For more information, see Quality of the statistics.

2 . Latest changes to quality and methods

We updated this guide on 23 September 2026. Important changes to quality and methods since we updated the previous quality and methods information report on 2 July 2025 include:

- combining the previous quality and methodology information report and user guide into one quality and methods guide
- amending the layouts of the data tables and combining statistics on divorces and dissolutions into one spreadsheet
- publishing statistics for all legal partnership dissolutions (divorces and civil partnership dissolutions combined)
- increasing the number of data tables covering civil partnership dissolutions
- changing the methodology for producing the divorce rates, to make use of the population estimates for the married population by partnership type
- publishing opposite-sex divorce rates for males and females combined and separately, and same-sex divorce rates only for males and females combined, not separately
- publishing civil partnership dissolution rates for all civil partnerships combined (no split by partnership type or sex) and for 2007 to 2019 only

For more information on latest, past and upcoming changes, go to Changes and their effects on comparability over time.

3 . What the statistics cover

The statistics cover divorces and civil partnership dissolutions granted in England and Wales during the reference year. They are based on the date the final order or nullity order was granted, not the date of separation or the date proceedings began. Data relating to court proceedings, including applications, conditional orders and the time taken from application to final order, are published by the Ministry of Justice in their Family Court Statistics Quarterly release.

Divorces and dissolutions where the marriage or civil partnership formation took place abroad are included provided the marriage was legally recognised in the UK and one or both parties had a permanent home in England or Wales.

Divorce statistics are available from 1858 onwards for opposite-sex couples and 2015 onwards for same-sex couples. Following the first marriages of same-sex couples on 29 March 2014, the first divorces of same-sex couples were in 2015. Same-sex couples have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage since 10 December 2014. Civil partnerships converted to a marriage, which then ended in divorce, are included in the divorce statistics rather than the civil partnership dissolution statistics.

Civil partnership dissolution statistics are available from 2007 onwards for same-sex couples and 2021 onwards for opposite-sex couples. These dates reflect the first recorded civil partnership dissolutions following the introduction of same-sex civil partnerships on 5 December 2005 and opposite-sex civil partnerships on 31 December 2019.

New legislation came into effect on 6 April 2022, following the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020. The main changes include the ability for either a joint or sole application for divorce or civil partnership dissolution, the removal of the Facts (that is, no grounds for divorce or civil partnership dissolution) and the introduction of a minimum 20-week period between the start of proceedings and application for final order.

Divorce statistics include final orders issued under the new law and decree absolutes issued for applications begun before 6 April 2022. Nullities (also known as annulments), where the marriage or civil partnership is either void or voidable, are also included in the total divorce and dissolutions figures.

The published outputs include:

- annual numbers of divorces and civil partnership dissolutions by partnership type (opposite-sex or same-sex) and order granted (final order or nullity)
- numbers of new law divorces and dissolutions split by sole or joint applicant
- numbers of old law divorces and dissolutions by party to whom granted and fact proven
- number of nullities by party granted
- divorce and civil partnership dissolution rates
- duration of marriage or civil partnership to the final legal order
- percentages of marriages and civil partnerships ending in divorce by year of legal partnership formation

The statistics do not cover couples who separate without legally ending their marriage or civil partnership.

Breakdowns by area of residence are not available because this is not included in the data supplied to us.

Information on age and previous marital status is no longer collected during the divorce process, as of 2020. As a result, divorce data broken down by age and/or previous marital status are no longer available in the latest data tables. Historical data can be accessed in the 2019 editions of the divorces (XLS, 512KB) and dissolutions (XLS, 90KB) datasets.

Since 2014, it has not been mandatory for couples divorcing to provide details of children, a consequence of the Children and Families Act 2014. Statistics relating to children of divorcing couples were discontinued from 2015 onwards. Historical data can be accessed in the 2014 edition of the divorces dataset (XLS, 505KB).

4 . Where the data come from

HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) records information during the legal process for divorces, civil partnership dissolutions and nullities. The date of marriage is provided by the applicant, with the date of final order, partnership type, applicant type (sole or joint) and facts proven (old law only) supplied by the court. HMCTS supplies administrative extracts of case-level data to us for statistical production.

For the 2020 data year onwards, most HMCTS records have been extracted from the Core Case Data (CCD) management system and sent to us electronically. Some old-law cases and nullities continue to be extracted from the previous FamilyMan (FM) case management system, which was primarily used between 2013 and 2019. Before 2013, statistics were derived mainly from paper D105 and D106 forms used to record decree absolutes (now called final orders).

5 . How we produce the statistics

Rates

Divorce and dissolution rates are calculated using the most up-to-date population estimates by marital status available at the time of publication. If the population estimates by marital status are revised, our back series of published divorce and dissolution rates are recalculated for the next annual publication using the revised estimates.

The population estimates by marital status are produced by applying legal marital status distributions from the Labour Force Survey to the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales. They are published with confidence intervals and measures of statistical robustness to reflect the uncertainty that comes from survey-based estimates. We have reflected this uncertainty in the data tables by presenting a reliability indicator alongside the rates. This reliability indicator should be taken into consideration when using the divorce and dissolution rates.

Divorce rates

Divorce rates are the number of people who got divorced in the year per 1,000 married people in the population. For the first time in the 2024 and 2025 data release, we have produced divorce rates for all divorces (opposite-sex and same-sex couples combined), for males and females combined and separately.

We have also produced divorce rates for opposite-sex and same-sex couples separately but have changed the methodology from that used in previous years. These rates have been calculated using the estimates of the married population by partnership type as the denominators, whereas previously, the estimates of the total married population were used as the denominators. This change has been implemented so that comparisons can be made between divorce rates for same-sex and opposite-sex couples. The change in methodology has been applied to the back series.

The divorce rate for opposite-sex couples is now the number of people in opposite-sex marriages who got divorced in the year per 1,000 people in opposite-sex marriages in the population.

The divorce rates for opposite-sex couples have been calculated for males and females separately and combined. While the actual number of males and females in opposite-sex couples getting a divorce in a particular year is equal, the number of married males and females can differ because one partner could live away, either overseas or in a communal establishment such as a care home or prison. For this reason, opposite-sex divorce rates for males and females can differ for a particular year.

The divorce rate for same-sex couples is the number of people in same-sex marriages who got divorced in the year per 1,000 people in same-sex marriages in the population.

The same-sex divorce rates are subject to more variability than the opposite-sex divorce rates. This is because people in same-sex marriages (the denominator for the same-sex divorce rates) represent a small proportion of the population, with less than 1% of adults aged 18 years and over in 2025 estimated to be in a same-sex marriage. When estimating population sizes, the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the less precise that estimate is.

We have produced divorce rates for the total population in same-sex marriages but not for males and females separately. This is because the Labour Force Survey includes too few people in same-sex marriages to produce reliable estimates by sex.

Civil partnership dissolution rates

Civil partnership dissolution rates are the number of people who dissolved a civil partnership in the year per 1,000 civil partnered people.

Opposite-sex civil partnerships were introduced on 31 December 2019 but estimates of the civil partnered population are only available for same-sex and opposite-sex couples combined, not separately. This is because the relevant information is not collected in the Labour Force Survey to enable this split to be provided. It is therefore not possible to produce civil partnership dissolution rates for opposite-sex and same-sex couples separately using the updated methodology that has been applied to the divorce rates.

We have published civil partnership dissolution rates for 2007 to 2019 but not for 2020 onwards because of concerns about the quality of the population estimates by marital status for the civil partnered population.

While the estimates accurately reflect the responses collected by the survey, analysis suggests that some respondents may not correctly understand the legal partnership (marital status) question and its response options. As a result, some people may be incorrectly recorded as being in a civil partnership, which could lead to the published estimates being higher than the actual number of people in civil partnerships. This issue was also found in the Census 2021 responses to the marital status question, as explained in our Census 2021 marriage and civil partnership status article.

Our analysis suggests that this issue has mainly affected the estimates of the civil partnered population from 2020 onwards. This coincides with the introduction of opposite-sex civil partnerships on 31 December 2019. For this reason, we have not published civil partnership dissolution rates for 2020 onwards.

The issue may also have affected the estimates for 2007 to 2019, but analysis suggests that if so, it is to a much lesser extent, and the estimates remain of sufficient quality for use in producing the civil partnership dissolution rates. The civil partnership dissolution rates for 2007 to 2019 have therefore been published.

As with the same-sex married population, the civil partnered population represent a small proportion of the overall population. This means that the civil partnered population estimates and resulting dissolution rates will be less precise and subject to more variability than the opposite-sex divorce rates. A reliability indicator is provided alongside the data to reflect this and should be taken into account when using the civil partnership dissolution rates for 2007 to 2019.

We have produced civil partnership dissolution rates for the total civil partnered population but not for males and females separately. This is because the Labour Force Survey includes too few people in civil partnerships to produce reliable estimates by sex.

Legal partnership dissolution rates

Legal partnership dissolution rates are the number of people who got divorced, or dissolved a civil partnership, in the year per 1,000 married or civil partnered people. Rates for legal partnership dissolutions have been provided where the estimates of both the married and civil partnered populations (where applicable) are available and have been deemed to be of sufficient quality.

The rates for opposite-sex legal partnership dissolutions use the estimates of the population in opposite-sex legal partnerships as the denominators. The rates for same-sex legal partnership dissolutions use the estimates of the population in same-sex legal partnerships as the denominators. The rates for all legal partnership dissolutions use the estimates of the total population in legal partnerships as the denominators.

Duration of legal partnership

The statistics on duration of legal partnership to final order are derived using the date of marriage or civil partnership and the date of final order. The median duration of legal partnership at final order is the middle value when the durations are arranged in increasing order. The median is used, rather than the mean, because the data on duration of legal partnerships at dissolution are not symmetrically distributed. Therefore, the median provides a more accurate reflection of the average duration of legal partnership. Median durations have only been provided in the data tables where there were 10 or more cases.

In some cases, the duration of a legal partnership type may exceed the period for which that partnership type has been legally recognised in England and Wales. This can occur where a same-sex civil partnership has been converted to a marriage, or where the legal partnership was formed elsewhere in the UK or abroad. In the case of conversions, the duration of marriage at divorce is calculated using the date the civil partnership was formed rather than the date of conversion.

Cohort analysis

Most statistics are presented by the calendar year in which the divorce or dissolution was granted but the cohort tables instead group divorce and dissolution cases by year of marriage or civil partnership.

The cumulative percentages of legal partnerships ending in dissolution are derived using our statistics on the number of marriages and civil partnerships registered in England and Wales each year, combined with the divorces and dissolutions data supplied by HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS). The number of legal partnerships in a year forms the denominator and the cumulative number of dissolutions from that cohort by each anniversary forms the numerator. The marriage and civil partnership statistics are derived from information recorded when marriages are registered, with these data supplied to us by the General Register Office.

The cohort tables are based on the following assumptions:

1. all couples who have dissolved their legal partnership in England and Wales also formed their legal partnership in England and Wales

2. of couples who formed their legal partnership in England and Wales, all who subsequently dissolved the legal partnership did so in England and Wales

However, we know that these assumptions are not true in all cases, which will affect the true percentages. For example, couples who usually reside in England and Wales but form a legal partnership outside England and Wales are not included in the formation figures, but will be included in dissolution figures if they are granted a dissolution in England and Wales. This would lead to an over-estimation of the proportion of legal partnerships ending in dissolution.

The accompanying dataset provides three cohort tables:

1. Cumulative percentage of legal partnerships (marriages and civil partnerships combined) ending in dissolution (divorce or civil partnership dissolution), by year of legal partnership formation and anniversary (Table 9a)

2. Cumulative percentage of marriages ending in divorce, by year of marriage and anniversary (Table 9b)

3. Cumulative percentage of civil partnerships ending in dissolution, by year of civil partnership formation and anniversary (Table 9c)

In Table 9b, couples who have converted a same-sex civil partnership into a marriage are not included in the marriage totals but are recorded within divorce numbers based on the duration from civil partnership formation to divorce. Conversely, in Table 9c, these couples would be included in the civil partnership formation totals but not the civil partnership dissolution numbers. In Table 9a, these couples would be included in the legal partnership formation total based on the date that the civil partnership was formed, and in the legal partnership dissolution number based on the date of divorce.

6 . Quality of the statistics

Statistical designation

The Office for Statistics Regulation independently reviewed these accredited official statistics in December 2011 (Civil partnerships in England and Wales) and April 2012 (Divorces in England and Wales). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled "accredited official statistics".

How we quality assure the data and statistics

Upon receipt of the data from HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), we conduct the following quality checks:

- check for duplicates in the case number variable
- check data formats and values are as expected
- check that the date of dissolution is within the year of interest and we have data for all months
- produce counts of the number of cases and breakdowns by various variables, and compare with previous years and where applicable, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) family court statistics; more information on the comparability of Office for National Statistics (ONS) and MoJ divorce statistics can be found in the Comparability and coherence with other statistics producers section
- check the number of cases with a date of formation before legally possible in England and Wales; these partnerships may have been formed outside England and Wales in countries where they were legally recognised, so these cases are not removed, we just check that the number is relatively small

We raise any potential issues with HMCTS and the data are resupplied if necessary.

In the 2023 to 2025 data, there were notably more cases compared with previous years where the sex of the applicant, respondent, or both was missing. Where only one party's sex was missing, we manually assigned the missing information using the recorded partnership type and the known sex of the other party. However, in cases where both sexes were missing, or where the partnership type did not align with the listed sexes, these records were classified as "Unspecified" in published tables. We will continue to monitor the number of cases with missing sex information in future data supplies.

To quality assure the population estimates by marital status (used as the denominators for calculating divorce and dissolution rates), we used civil registration data on marriage and civil partnership formations, divorces and civil partnership dissolutions, and conversions of civil partnerships to marriages. We would not expect numbers produced using registration data to match the official estimates, as the registration data do not account for migration, death or legal partnership formation or dissolution abroad. However, they provide a useful comparator to assess the reliability of the population estimates by marital status produced from the Labour Force Survey.

For the 2024 and 2025 publication, the data tables were produced using a new reproducible analytical pipeline (RAP) programmed using R open-source software. We have quality assured the new RAP via dual running against the previous code and peer review. The RAP minimises manual intervention when producing new estimates and therefore reduces the risk of error.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths

- The data arise from a legal administrative process and provide coverage of divorces, dissolutions and nullities granted in England and Wales.
- The applicant must swear under oath that the information supplied is correct.
- Electronic transfer supports more complete annual receipt than the former paper process.
- The long time series supports analysis of change over time, subject to legal and system changes, and ongoing availability of variables.

Limitations

- The statistics do not capture separation without legal divorce or dissolution.
- Statistics broken down by area are not available.
- Legal and court-system changes affect available variables and comparability over time, with statistics on age, marital status and children of divorcing couples no longer available.
- Some people who are usually resident in England and Wales may undertake divorce or civil partnership dissolution proceedings in another country so are not included in our statistics; similarly some people who are overseas residents may divorce or dissolve a civil partnership in England and Wales.
- The population estimates by marital status used to produce the divorce and dissolution rates are subject to sampling variability; this affects the reliability of our published rates.
- Marriage-cohort estimates rely on assumptions about marriage location and migration, which we know are not correct in all cases.

European Statistical System Quality Dimensions

The ONS has developed guidelines for measuring statistical quality, based on the five European Statistical System (ESS) Quality Dimensions. These are:

- relevance
- accuracy and reliability
- timeliness and punctuality
- comparability and coherence
- accessibility and clarity

We have integrated these considerations into the guide.

7 . Changes and their effects on comparability over time

Latest changes

Combined 2024 and 2025 release

In recent years, the release of divorce and dissolution statistics has been delayed because of resource constraints, particularly linked to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and delays to the publication of population estimates by marital status. We also delayed the release of the 2024 data to allow time to redesign the data tables. To resume a more timely release of divorce and dissolution statistics, we have published the 2024 and 2025 statistics together within one release. From next year, we plan to return to publishing each additional year of data 9 to 12 months after the end of the reference year.

New quality and methods guide

The separate quality and methods information report and user guide have been consolidated into this quality and methods guide. This changes how guidance is presented, rather than the underlying statistics.

Table redesign

We have amended the layouts of the data tables to make them more machine-readable, with the underlying code transformed into a reproducible analytical pipeline (RAP) as part of this process. We have also combined the divorce and dissolution statistics into one spreadsheet and now provide figures for all legal partnership dissolutions (divorces and civil partnership dissolutions combined) in all data tables. A lookup between the old and new data tables is provided in the divorces and dissolutions dataset.

Additional civil partnership dissolution statistics

As part of combining the divorce and dissolution statistics into one spreadsheet, we are now providing new breakdowns of the civil partnership dissolution statistics, by:

- order granted (Table 2)
- facts proven for old-law cases (Table 4)
- nullities by party to whom granted (Table 5)
- duration of civil partnership in completed years (Table 7)
- median duration of civil partnership (Table 8)
- cumulative percentage of civil partnerships ending in dissolution (Table 9c)

The new breakdowns are currently only available back to 2015 because of data availability, but we are aiming to provide them for the full time series (back to 2007) in the future.

To bring the civil partnership dissolution statistics in line with those produced for divorces, we are no longer producing the following data tables:

- civil partnership dissolutions by quarter (previous Table 1)
- number of partners dissolving a civil partnership (previous Table 4), but this can be obtained by doubling the numbers of dissolutions in Table 1 of the new spreadsheet

Change to the minimum age of marriage

From 27 February 2023, the minimum legal age for marriage and civil partnership in England and Wales increased from 16 to 18 years, as a result of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022. Divorce and dissolution rates published for 2024 and earlier are based on populations aged 16 years and over. Rates published for 2025 onwards are based on populations aged 18 years and over.

Rates

As noted in the How we produce these statistics section, we have changed the method for producing the divorce and dissolution rates.

We have also made the following changes to which rates are being published:

- divorce rates are now published for all divorces (opposite-sex and same-sex couples combined), for males and females combined and separately
- opposite-sex divorce rates are published for males and females combined and separately
- same-sex divorce rates are published for all same-sex marriages but not for male and female same-sex marriages separately
- civil partnership dissolution rates are published for all civil partnerships combined (no split by partnership type or sex) and for 2007 to 2019 only
- new rates for legal partnership dissolutions (divorces and civil partnership dissolutions combined) have been published where the estimates of both the married and civil partnered populations (where applicable) are available and have been deemed to be of sufficient quality

The changes have been applied to the back series so the statistics within the data tables published on 23 September 2026 are comparable over time. The statistics published in these data tables are not comparable with those published in previous years.

Past changes

These changes are ordered by date, with the most recent first.

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020

New legislation came into effect on 6 April 2022, following the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020. The main changes include the ability for either a joint or sole application for divorce or civil partnership dissolution, the removal of the Facts (that is, no grounds for divorce or civil partnership dissolution) and the introduction of a minimum 20-week period between the start of proceedings and application for final order. This may have had an impact on the number and timing of divorces and dissolutions taking place in 2022.

Data tables from 2022 onwards include both old and new law cases, except in tables that specify either old or new law cases only. The year in the data tables refers to the year that the final order was granted, so, for 2025 for example, the old law cases are those where the application was made before 6 April 2022 but the final order was granted in 2025.

As the new legislation led to the removal of Facts (also known as grounds for divorce), breakdowns by fact proven are not available for new law cases. As the number of old law divorces being reported in the statistics decreases over time, the distribution of applications by facts and sex might differ.

Move to Core Case Data

From the 2020 data year, most data moved to the Core Case Data (CCD) system. Some old-law cases and nullities remain on the previous FamilyMan system.

Age and previous marital status

Information on age and previous marital status is no longer collected during the divorce process, as of 2020. As a result, divorce data broken down by age and/or previous marital status are no longer available in the latest data tables. Historical data can be accessed in the 2019 editions of the divorces (XLS, 512KB) and dissolution (XLS, 90KB) datasets.

Delays to processing of divorce applications

A backlog of divorce petitions made in 2017 were not processed until 2018. This resulted in fewer completed divorces in 2018 and more completed divorces in 2019. This, in part, explains the decrease in the number of divorces between 2017 and 2018, and the increase between 2018 and 2019. Median durations for divorces completed in 2018 and 2019 may also have been affected.

Children of divorcing couples

Since 2014, it has not been mandatory for couples divorcing to provide details of children, a consequence of the Children and Families Act 2014. Statistics relating to children of divorcing couples were discontinued from 2015 onwards. Historical data can be accessed in the 2014 edition of the divorces dataset (XLS 505KB).

Electronic FamilyMan extract

From the 2013 data year, electronic FamilyMan extracts replaced the main paper D105 process. This led to improvement in the completeness of the data supplied to us.

Upcoming changes

Potential future work includes:

- adding civil partnerships dissolutions data for 2007 to 2014 to all data tables
- providing cohort tables for opposite-sex and same-sex couples separately
- presenting additional measures of uncertainty alongside the divorce and dissolution rates

8 . Comparability and coherence with other statistics producers

Ministry of Justice

Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Family Court Statistics Quarterly figures are broadly comparable with ours because of the following similarities and differences:

- MoJ's statistics and ours both provide numbers based on the date of final order, though MoJ also provide statistics on applications and conditional orders
- MoJ's statistics (Table 12) are based on divorces and civil partnership dissolutions combined and separate out final orders and nullities; our equivalent figures can be found using the all legal partnerships columns across Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5
- MoJ's statistics on median time to final order refer to the time from divorce application to final order; our statistics on median duration refer to the duration of legal partnership from marriage or civil partnership formation to divorce or civil partnership dissolution
- MoJ's statistics and ours do not match exactly because the data are extracted from a live system on different dates; the back series of MoJ statistics are updated from the live system in subsequent publications whereas our back series is static and based on the data extracts taken when the statistics were first published

Scottish Government

Scottish Government's divorce and dissolution statistics are broadly comparable with ours because of the following similarities and differences:

- Scottish Government's statistics and ours are both based on returns of "orders made final" supplied by the courts and include nullities of marriage
- Scottish Government's statistics and ours are both based on the date of final order
- divorce and dissolution legislation is different in England and Wales compared with Scotland, meaning that the processes, requirements and timelines for obtaining a divorce differ
- the minimum age for marriage and civil partnerships has been 18 years of age in England and Wales since 27 February 2023 whereas it is still 16 years of age in Scotland; the impact of this difference on the comparability of the statistics is likely to be very minimal
- the data breakdowns in the tables differ, for example, statistics by age and method of celebration are published for Scotland but not England and Wales, whereas divorce and dissolution rates and the cohort tables are published for England and Wales but not Scotland
- other than one table of divorce and dissolution totals, which is published on a calendar year basis, all other divorce and dissolution statistics for Scotland are published by financial year (1 April to 31 March), whereas our statistics are published by calendar year

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) divorce and dissolution statistics are broadly comparable with ours because of the following similarities and differences:

- NISRA's statistics and ours are both based on returns of "orders made final" supplied by the courts and include nullities of marriage
- NISRA's statistics and ours are both based on the date of final order
- divorce and dissolution legislation is different in England and Wales compared with Northern Ireland, meaning that the processes, requirements and timelines for obtaining a divorce differ
- the minimum age for marriage and civil partnerships has been 18 years of age in England and Wales since 27 February 2023, whereas it is still 16 years of age in Northern Ireland; the impact of this difference on the comparability of the statistics is likely to be very minimal
- the data breakdowns in the tables differ, for example, statistics by marital status at the time of marriage, method of marriage celebration, children and local government district are available for Northern Ireland but not England and Wales, whereas divorce and dissolution rates and cohort tables are published for England and Wales but not Northern Ireland

9 . Users and uses of these statistics

Divorce and dissolution statistics are used widely to inform policy development, for example:

- the Department for Work and Pensions uses divorce and dissolution statistics in dynamic simulation models covering pension-age populations to model pensioner incomes, as well as entitlement to State Pensions and pension-age benefits
- the Ministry of Justice uses these statistics alongside operational information to inform policy, financial and workload decisions.

Other uses and users include:

- international organisations such as Eurostat and the United Nations, who use our divorce and dissolution statistics to compare similar statistics across different nations
- organisations in the voluntary sector, who may use our divorce and dissolution statistics to support campaigns
- lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law, who use the statistics to comment on trends in case law and to predict likely future trends in legal business
- academics and researchers, who use divorce and dissolution statistics for research into family change and to assess the implications on care, housing and finances in later life

10 . Definitions

Applicant

The person or persons seeking a divorce, civil partnership dissolution or nullity (previously referred to as the petitioner).

Facts proven

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 came into effect on 6 April 2022. Before this, a petitioner had to prove one or more Facts (including unreasonable behaviour, desertion, separation, either with or without consent of the respondent and adultery) to establish the irretrievable breakdown of the legal partnership.

Final order

For applications issued from 6 April 2022, the court order that legally ends a marriage or civil partnership (previously called the decree absolute).

Legal partnership dissolution

The legal ending of a marriage or civil partnership, including both final orders (or decree absolutes) and nullity orders.

Marriage or civil partnership cohort

A group of marriages or civil partnerships that took place in the same year.

Median duration of marriage at dissolution

The middle value when the data on duration are arranged in increasing order. The median is used, rather than the mean, because the data on the duration of legal partnerships at dissolution are not symmetrically distributed. Therefore, the median provides a more accurate reflection of the average duration of marriage.

Nullity order

A nullity order, commonly known as an annulment, declares that the marriage or civil partnership is void (that no valid marriage or civil partnership ever existed) or voidable (was legal at time of registration but is no longer legal). This was previously referred to as a "decree of nullity".

11 . Related links

Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales: 2024 and 2025
Bulletin | Released 23 September 2026
Divorce and civil partnership dissolution numbers and rates, by partnership type and duration of legal partnership.

Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales
Dataset | Released 23 September 2026
Divorce and civil partnership dissolution numbers and rates, by partnership type and duration of legal partnership.

Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2025
Bulletin | Released 31 July 2026
Annual estimates of population by legal marital status and cohabitation status by age and sex for England and Wales.

Divorce and dissolution statistics for Scotland
Publication | Released: 30 April 2024
Statistics on civil law cases in the Scottish courts together with other related information, such as statistics from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey.

Divorce statistics for Northern Ireland
Webpage | Released: 20 November 2025
Divorce statistics for Northern Ireland based on decree absolute data provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

Dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland
Webpage | Released: 20 November 2025
Dissolution statistics for Northern Ireland based on decree absolute data provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

Ministry of Justice Family Court Statistics Quarterly
Webpage | Last updated: 25 June 2026
A collection of accredited official statistics on activity in the family courts of England and Wales.

12 . Cite this page

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