

Statistical bulletin

Divorces in England and Wales: 2014

Dissolutions and annulments of marriage by previous marital status, sex, age, children, facts proven and to whom granted.



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1 . Main points

There were 111,169 divorces in 2014, a decrease of 3.1% compared with 2013 and a decline of 27% from a recent peak in 2003.

The number of divorces in 2014 was highest among men aged 45 to 49 and women aged 40 to 44.

In 2014, there were 9.3 men divorcing per thousand married males, a decrease of 5.1% compared with 2013 and a fall of 30.6% from a recent peak in the divorce rate in 2004.

In 2014, there were 9.3 women divorcing per thousand married females, a decrease of 5.1% compared with 2013 and a drop of 29.5% compared with 2004.

2 . Statistician's quote

“Compared with 2004, divorce rates in 2014 were lower for all age groups except women aged 55 and over. Likely factors include increased cohabiting and increasing age at first marriage. Previous research indicates a higher risk of divorce among those marrying at younger ages, whilst cohabitation may be reducing the number of weaker relationships progressing to marriage.”

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

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3 . Things you need to know about this release

Divorce statistics are derived from information recorded by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service during the divorce process.

Figures represent both divorces and annulments that took place in England and Wales; [annulments](#) are where the marriage was not legally valid in the first place.

Divorce statistics do not include married couples who separate, but do not divorce.

Divorces where the marriage took place abroad are included provided the marriage was legally recognised in the UK and 1 of the parties had a permanent home in England and Wales.

Marriages of same sex couples first took place on 29 March 2014, there were no divorces recorded between same sex couples in 2014. Figures will be included in this annual release when divorces are recorded between same sex couples.

4 . Divorces continue to decline in 2014

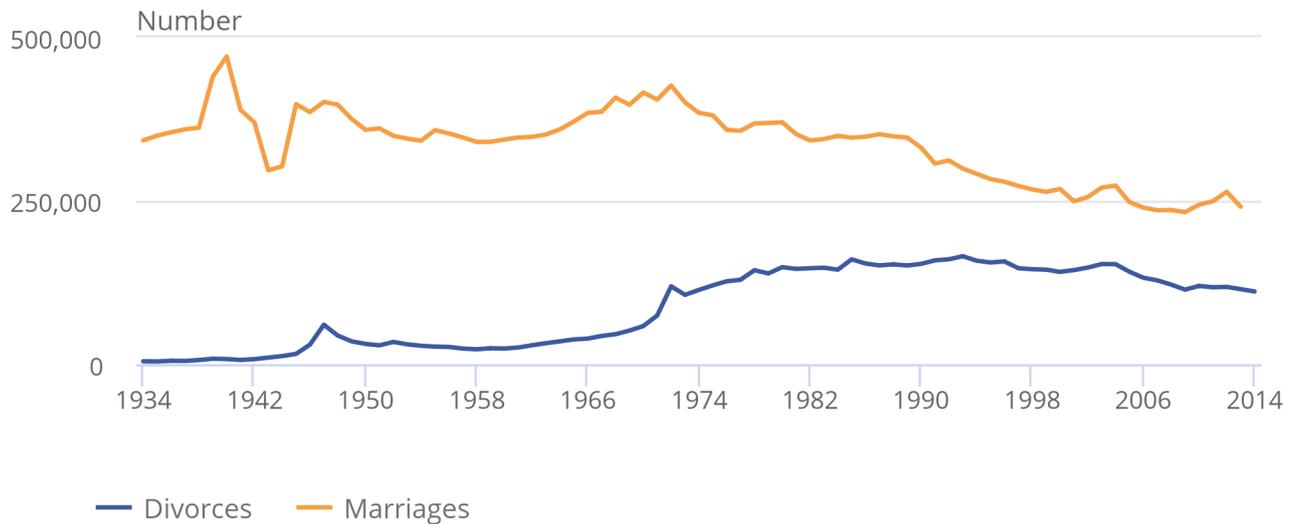
In 2014, the number of divorces in England and Wales decreased by 3.1% to 111,169 compared with 114,720 in 2013.

Figure 1: Number of marriages and divorces, 1934 to 2014

England and Wales

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England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

The fall in divorces between 2003 and 2009 is consistent with a decline in the number of marriages over the same period; the decrease in marriages may be due to the [increasing number of couples choosing to cohabit rather than enter into marriage](#). Following a period of relative stability in the number of divorces between 2009 and 2012, divorces continued to decline in 2013 and 2014.

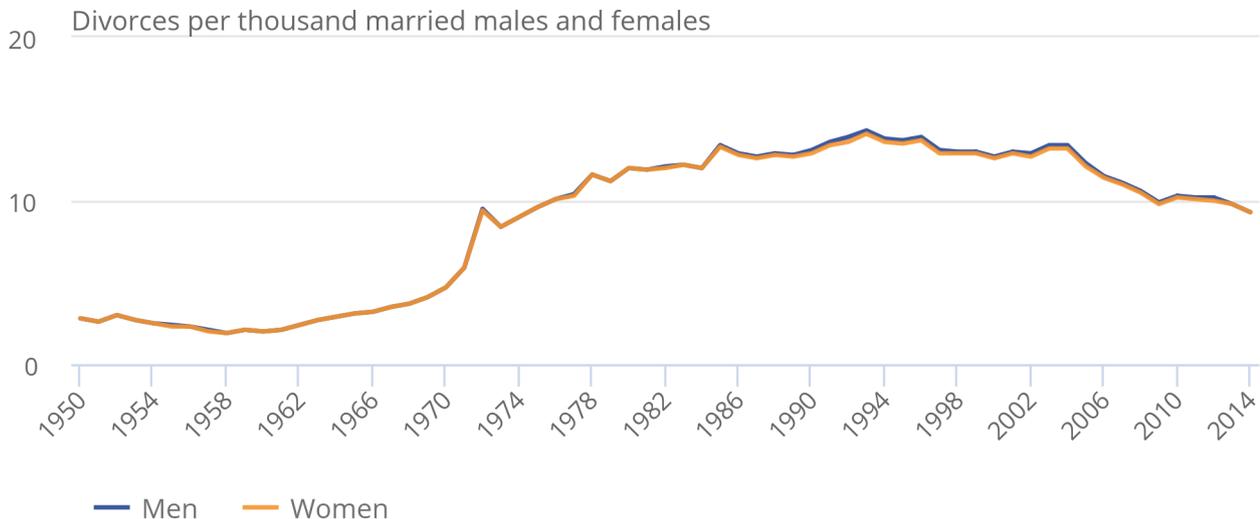
In 2014, the number of divorces per 1,000 married men and women aged 16 and over (divorce rates), also decreased for both men and women compared with 2013 (Figure 2). Divorce rates take account of changes in the size of the married adult population which affects the number of divorces (information about how divorce rates are calculated is available in the Quality and methodology section, point 9).

Figure 2: Divorce rates for men and women, 1950 to 2014

England and Wales

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England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Changes in behaviour and attitudes to divorce are considered to be an important factor behind the increase in divorce rates between the 1960s and the early 1990s. Also, the Divorce Reform Act 1969 came into effect in England and Wales on 1 January 1971, making it easier for couples to divorce upon separation – this caused a large increase in divorce rates in 1972.

Changes in attitudes to cohabitation as an alternative to marriage or prior to marriage, particularly at younger ages, are likely to have been a factor affecting the decrease in divorce rates since 2003; [levels of cohabitation](#) increased over this period while the married population declined. [Age at marriage is also considered to be closely linked to the risk of divorce](#) with those marrying in their teens and early twenties being at greater risk of divorce; our marriage statistics show that the [average age at marriage](#) has increased steadily since 1970 for both men and women.

5 . At what age are people getting divorced?

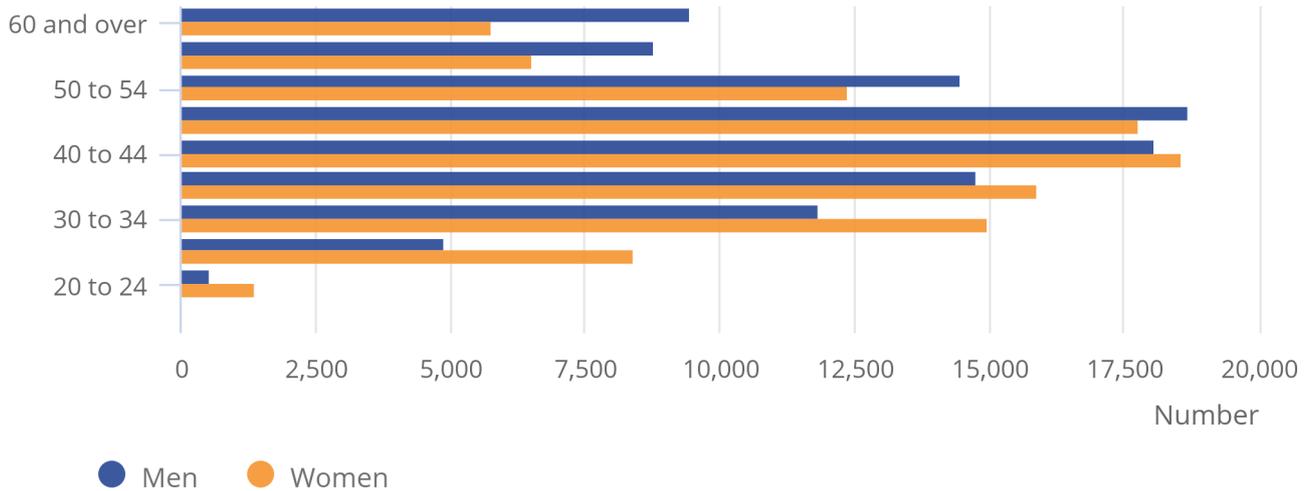
In 2014, more women than men divorced below the age of 45; at older ages more men than women divorced (Figure 3). This pattern reflects the fact that on average men marry women who are younger than themselves. In 2014, the number of divorces was highest among men aged 45 to 49 and women aged 40 to 44. This represents a change for men, since between 2005 and 2013, divorces were highest among men aged 40 to 44. Among women, those aged 40 to 44 have recorded the highest number of divorces each year since 2008.

Figure 3: Age of men and women divorcing, 2014

England and Wales

Figure 3: Age of men and women divorcing, 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures by age will not sum to the total number of divorces because 8% of records have no age stated for the wife and 9% of records have no age stated for the husband.

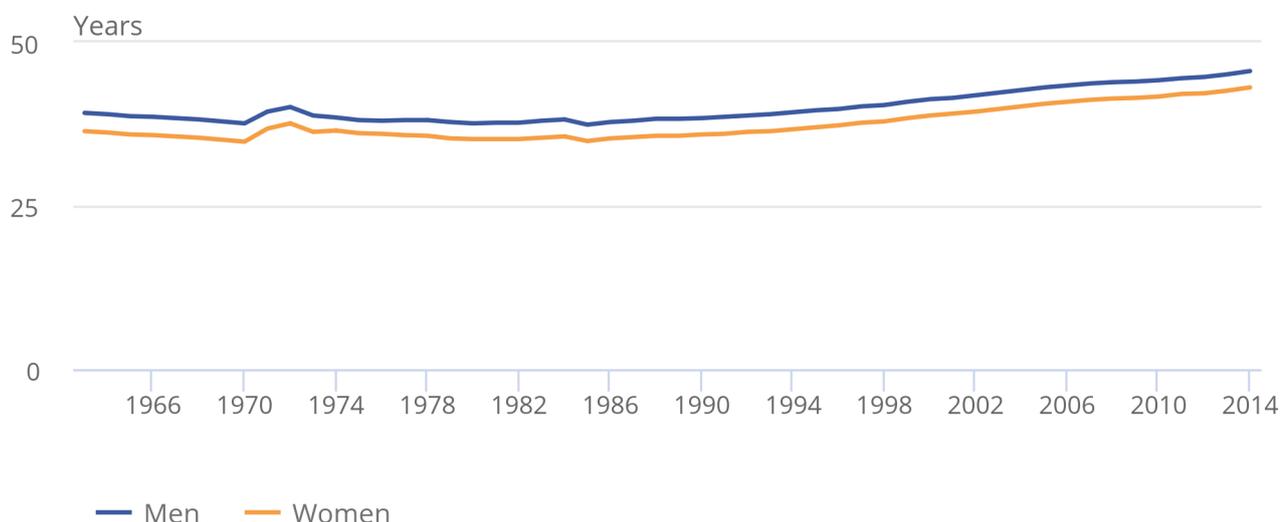
The average (mean) age at divorce for both men and women has increased every year between 1985 and 2014, rising by over 8 years (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Average (mean) age at divorce for men and women, 1963 to 2014

England and Wales

Figure 4: Average (mean) age at divorce for men and women, 1963 to 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Average age at divorce is only available back to 1963.

When considering changes in the number of divorces by age for men and women, it is important to also take account of the size of the married population, since any changes in this will affect the number of divorces. In 2014, the number of men and women divorcing per thousand married men or women (divorce rate) decreased in all age groups, compared with 2013. It should be noted that in 2014, 8% of records have no age stated for the wife and 9% of records have no age stated for the husband; rates by age have been calculated excluding these records – the Quality and methodology section, point 10 provides further information.

Figures 5 and 6 compare divorce rates in 2004 and 2014 for men and women respectively. For men, divorce rates have declined in all age groups; for women, rates have declined for those aged under 55 but increased by 1.9% for ages 55 to 59 and remained unchanged for ages 60 and over.

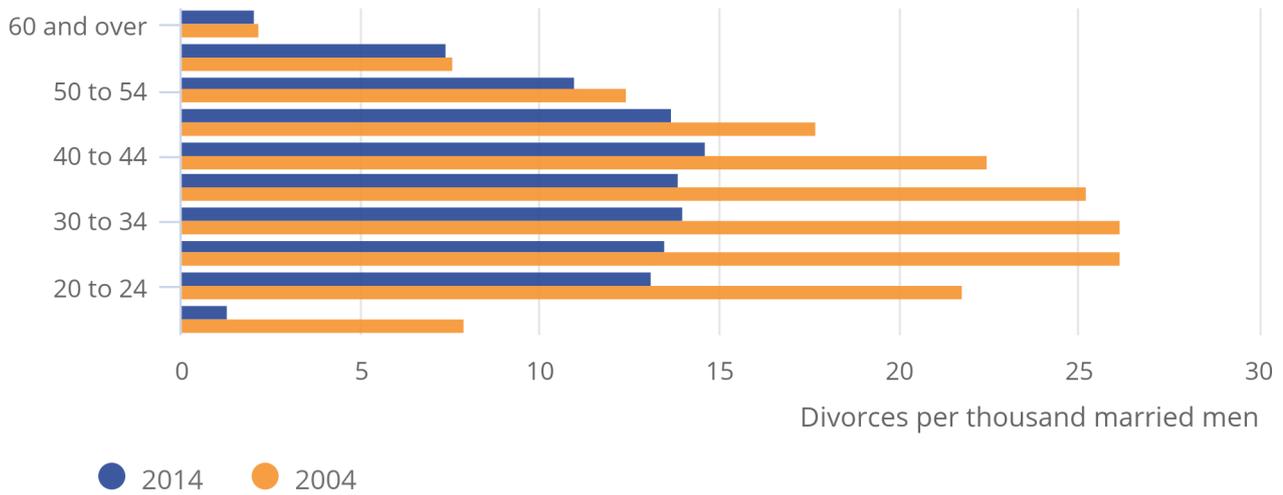
Men and women aged under 20 have recorded the greatest percentage decrease in divorce rates between 2004 and 2014, reducing by 84% for men and 80% for women. At older ages, divorce rates have decreased by smaller amounts; rates for men aged 55 to 59 and 60 and over declined by 2.6% and 4.5% respectively.

Figure 5: Divorce rates by age for men, 2004 and 2014

England and Wales

Figure 5: Divorce rates by age for men, 2004 and 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

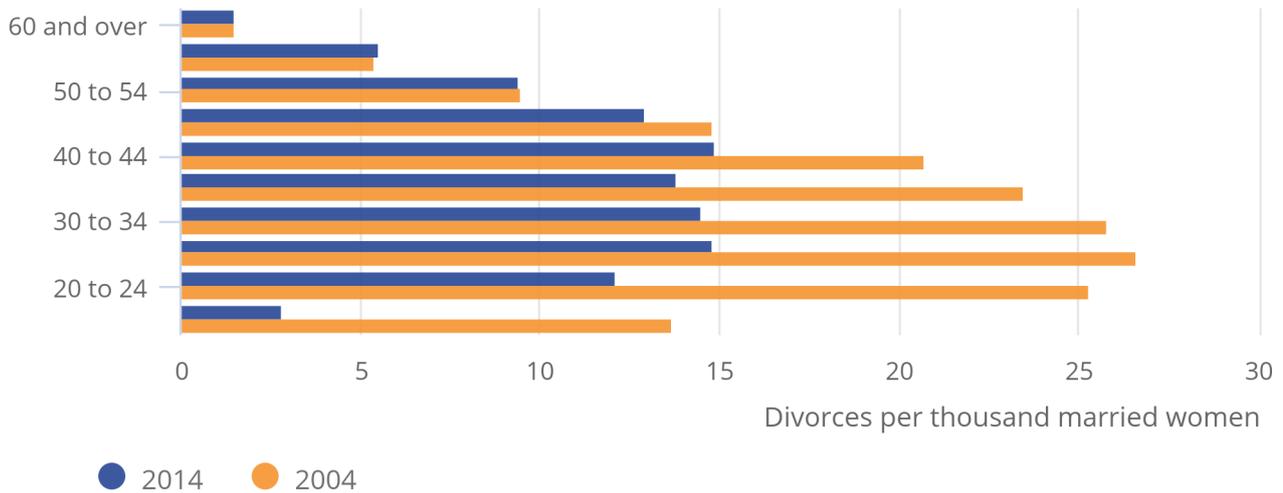
1. In 2014, 9% of records have no age stated for the husband; rates by age have been calculated excluding these records.

Figure 6: Divorce rates by age for women, 2004 and 2014

England and Wales

Figure 6: Divorce rates by age for women, 2004 and 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. In 2014, 8% of records have no age stated for the wife; rates by age have been calculated excluding these records.

6 . How long do marriages which end in divorce last?

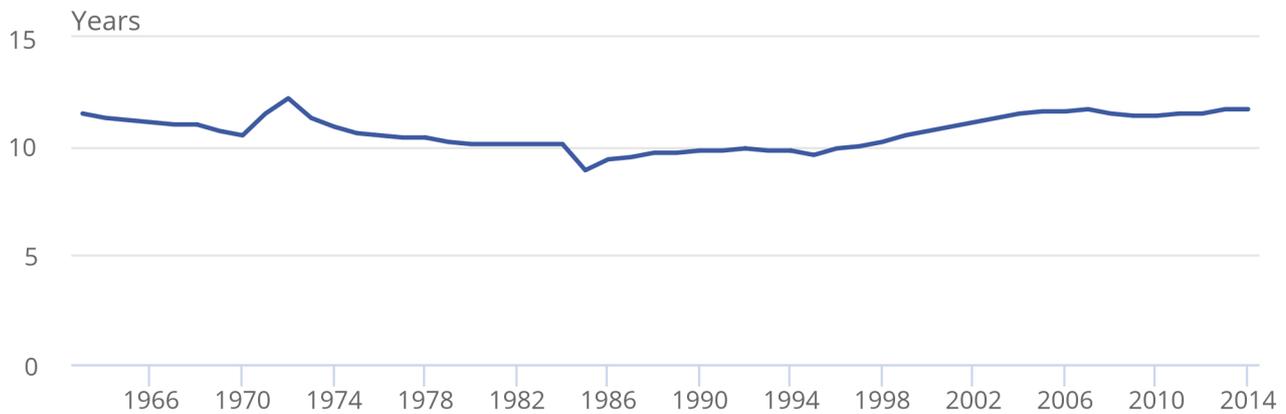
The median duration of marriage (the mid-point of all durations) for divorces granted in 2014 was 11.7 years, unchanged from 2013. There has been a very gradual increase in the median duration of marriages which end in divorce since 2009 when it was 11.4 years. Over the last 50 years, the median duration has remained relatively stable fluctuating between 8.9 years and 12.2 years (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Median duration of marriage, 1963 to 2014

England and Wales

Figure 7: Median duration of marriage, 1963 to 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 came into effect in England and Wales on 12 October 1984. The Act replaced the minimum time interval between the date of marriage and being able to file a petition for divorce from 3 years to 1 year, resulting in a fall in the median duration of marriage in 1985.

7 . What percentage of marriages end in divorce?

The percentage of marriages ending in divorce has generally increased for those marrying between the early 1970s and the early 1990s. For example 22% of marriages in 1970 had ended by the 15th wedding anniversary, whereas 33% of marriages in 1995 had ended after the same period of time. For those marrying since 2000, there is some evidence of decreases in the proportion of marriages ending in divorce. The proportion of men and women who had ever divorced has also declined over recent decades.

The cumulative percentages of marriages which end in divorce increase more rapidly in the first 10 years of marriage than the 10 years after that. Once the 20th wedding anniversary is reached, the cumulative percentages increase less rapidly.

More explanations of these trends are available alongside the [data](#).

8 . Links to related ONS statistics

For more detailed divorce statistics see our [reference tables](#) which provide a long time series, or our [explorable dataset](#) which provide detailed divorce statistics for 2009 to 2014.

The number of divorces and the divorce rate for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#).

[What percentage of marriages end in divorce?](#) shows that the estimated percentage of marriages ending in divorce (assuming 2010 divorce and mortality rates throughout the duration of marriage) is 42%. Around half of these divorces are expected to occur in the first 10 years of marriage.

Further statistics on [marriages](#), [civil partnership formations and dissolutions](#), [families and households](#), and [population estimates by marital status](#) are available on our website. We also have [explorable datasets](#) for marriages.

Special extracts and tabulations of divorces data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [ONS charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch (vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk or telephone: +44 (0)1329 444110). User requested data will be published onto [our website](#).

9 . What has changed within this publication?

Following our consultation on [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics for England and Wales](#) which ran from 8 October to 17 December 2013, the data published alongside this release has changed. Summary tables now provide a long time series for comparison, with one table providing data back to 1858. An [explorable dataset](#) can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for 2009 to 2014. A [document summarising these changes](#) and the responses we received to our consultation was published in April 2014.

Improvements have also been made to this bulletin and its contents, to provide a more concise summary of the main statistics. We welcome feedback on these changes.

10 . Quality and methodology

1. This is the first time that divorce statistics for England and Wales have been published for 2014; the release provides final annual data.
2. We aim to publish annual divorce statistics around 12 to 13 months after the end of the reference period. The release of 2014 statistics was delayed due to data processing changes required given our move to receiving data electronically from the 2013 data year instead of paper forms; this required more time to be spent on detailed quality assurance. Delays to other related publications have also impacted on the publication of 2014 divorce statistics due to available staff resource. From 2016 we have been receiving monthly datasets rather than annual – this will enable more timely future publications.
3. Divorce statistics are compiled to enable the analysis of social and demographic trends. They are also used for considering and monitoring policy changes.
4. The [Divorces Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:
 - the strengths and limitations of the data
 - the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data, how it compares with related data
 - uses and users
 - how the output was created
5. Our [User Guide to Divorce Statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to divorces and includes a glossary of terms.
6. Divorce statistics are comparable between countries within the UK; more information on comparability is contained in [Divorces Quality and Methodology Information](#).
7. The [Revisions policy for population statistics \(including divorce statistics\)](#) is available on our website.
8. The average (mean) ages presented in this release have not been standardised for age, and therefore do not take account of the changing structure of the male and female population by age and marital status.
9. Male and female divorce rates are calculated by dividing the number of males or females divorcing in a particular year by the estimated number of married males or females aged 16 and over in that year ([population estimates by marital status](#)). While the actual number of males and females getting divorced in a particular year is equal, the number of married males and females can differ because 1 partner could live away, either overseas or in a communal establishment such as a care home or prison. For this reason, divorce rates for males and females can differ for a particular year.
10. One way to assess the impact of records where the age at divorce was not stated on divorce rates for 2014, is to proportionately distribute the 'not stated' ages using the age distribution where age was recorded in 2014. Using this approach, 2014 divorce rates are lower than in 2013 except for men aged 50 and over and women aged 40 to 59, where rates either increased slightly or remained unchanged. When compared with 2004, this approach suggests that divorce rates are lower in 2014 with the exception of men aged 55 and over, and women aged 50 and over where rates increased slightly.