

# Divorces in England and Wales QMI

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# 1 . Methodology background

<b>National Statistic</b>	
<b>Frequency</b>	Annual
<b>How compiled</b>	Based on third party data
<b>Geographic coverage</b>	England and Wales
<b>Last revised</b>	26 September 2018

## 2 . Important points about divorce statistics

- Divorce statistics are derived from information recorded by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals 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 one of the parties had a permanent home in England and Wales.
- Marriages of same-sex couples first took place on 29 March 2014; the first divorces recorded between same-sex couples were in 2015.
- Civil partnership dissolutions are not included in our divorce statistics, they are reported separately in [Civil partnerships in England and Wales](#).

## 3 . Overview of the output

Divorces taking place in England and Wales are recorded by the courts onto the HM Courts and Tribunals Service's (HMCTS) FamilyMan case management system and sent to us electronically for the production and analysis of statistics.

We are responsible for publishing demographic statistics on [divorces](#) taking place in England and Wales. The statistics are published by sex, age and marital status at the time of marriage, duration of marriage to decree absolute, age at divorce and the grounds for divorce. The number and ages of children involved were also published up until the 2015 data year. Since 2014, it has not been mandatory for couples divorcing to provide information on children, consequently, we discontinued these figures; more information is available in the accuracy section.

Figures represent both divorces and annulments that took place in England and Wales; a marriage is dissolved, following a petition for divorce and the granting of a decree absolute, or annulled, following a petition for nullity and the awarding of a decree of nullity.

Since 2014 data year, our annual divorces release includes a selection of [summary datasets](#) and a more detailed [explorable dataset](#). A statistical bulletin provides commentary on the main points. The summary datasets provide extensive time series for comparison. The explorable dataset provides more detailed data on divorces of opposite-sex couples in England and Wales for 2009 onwards; figures can be extracted on age of husband and wife at divorce, fact proven, length of marriage, petitioner, previous marital status of husband and wife, and whether the couple had children (available until 2014 only).

Prior to the 2014 data year, a series of more detailed [datasets](#) were published with an accompanying statistical bulletin, presenting the latest year's figures and historical data where possible.

Annual divorce statistics for the UK and its constituent countries are published in the [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#).

Divorce statistics for 2007 and earlier years were published in the annual reference volume [Series FM2](#); the final volume of FM2 was produced in March 2010.

Following the implementation of the [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#), the first marriages of same-sex couples took place on 29 March 2014. Civil partners have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage, if they so desired, from 10 December 2014. Figures showing the number of divorces to same-sex couples have since been included in our annual divorce publications – the first divorces recorded between same-sex couples in England and Wales were in 2015.

Our [User guide to divorce statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to divorces.

## 4 . Output quality

This report provides a range of information that describes the quality of the data and details any points that should be noted when using the output.

We have developed [Guidelines for measuring statistical quality](#) based on the five European Statistical System (ESS) quality dimensions. This report addresses these quality dimensions and other important quality characteristics, which are:

- relevance
- timeliness and punctuality
- accuracy
- coherence and comparability
- output quality trade-offs
- assessment of user needs and perceptions
- accessibility and clarity

## 5 . About the output

## Relevance

(The degree to which statistical outputs meet users' needs.)

We use marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics to:

- report on social and demographic trends
- inform policymakers about recent trends and policy impact, such as the proportion of marriages that end in divorce

We analyse and publish demographic information collected by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is responsible for policy and legislation on divorces and is one of the main users of divorce statistics. MoJ rely on our statistics to inform policy, financial and workload decisions.

In 2014, all [relationship support policy](#) was brought under the remit of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). At the same time, every government department was made accountable for the impact of their policies on the family. [DWP](#) is encouraging family-based arrangements where appropriate by improving the availability of support for couples.

DWP uses divorce data in dynamic simulation models covering pension-age populations to model pensioner incomes, as well as entitlement to State Pensions and pension-age benefits. This involves modelling whole life courses, including the formation of partnerships (marriage, civil partnership and cohabitation) and dissolution of the same partnerships. The projections used rely on the associated historic data.

Organisations, such as Eurostat, use our divorce statistics for comparison purposes and organisations in the voluntary sector may use our divorce statistics to support campaigns. These organisations often pass on our divorce statistics to their own users.

Lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law use divorce data to comment on trends in case law and predict likely future trends in legal business. Academics and researchers use divorce data for research into family change and assessing the implications on care, housing and finances in later life. The media also has a high level of interest in divorces, especially the recent [trend for older people to divorce](#).

We are unable to produce divorce statistics by area of residence – divorce data provided to us by the courts does not contain information on the area of residence of the parties. Since 2018, [Family court statistics quarterly](#) published by MoJ has included a file in CSV format containing petitioner's local authority of usual residence. Information on the location of the court is also available from [Family court statistics quarterly](#); however, court location does not accurately reflect where parties lived either before or after separation; divorce courts were also centralised in 2015 to 11 main divorce centres throughout England and Wales.

## Timeliness and punctuality

(Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.)

The annual release of divorce statistics is announced on the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) at least four weeks in advance. Prior to 2016 data, we aimed to publish annual divorce statistics around 12 to 13 months after the end of the reference period. From the 2015 data year, divorce data were received monthly, three months after the end of the month; this enabled timely quality assurance and more timely publications from the 2016 data year than previously possible - we now aim to publish data around nine months after the end of the data year. Divorces in 2018 are now received 15 days after the end of the month. The final annual dataset is then received three months after the year end.

Final divorce statistics for 2007 and earlier were published alongside final marriage statistics in the [Annual Reference Volume FM2](#). The concluding volume of FM2 was published in March 2010 (2007 divorces data). Final divorce statistics for 2008 to 2015 took place around 12 to 13 months after the end of the data year.

There have been three occasions when the divorces release has been delayed. The release of 2013, 2014 and 2015 statistics was delayed due to data processing changes following the move to receiving electronic data, rather than paper forms. This change occurred from the 2013 data year and more time has been required for detailed quality assurance following the processing changes. The 2013 release was also delayed to enable new and revised [population estimates by marital status](#) to be used in the calculation of divorce rates. Delays to other related publications also impacted on the 2014 divorces publication date due to available staff resource.

During quality assurance work in 2008, we identified a shortfall of divorce records for 2007 for some courts between Office for National Statistics (ONS) and MoJ. Further investigation identified that duplicates existed in both datasets. Both organisations began the task of removing these duplicates and consequently divorce statistics for 2003 to 2007 were revised on 28 January 2010. These revised figures were published alongside final summary divorce figures for 2008.

Although this first release of 2008 divorces was later than the usual publication date at the time (August), the release provided final summary data rather than provisional data previously published at this point.

For more details on related releases, the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) is available online and provides 12 months' advance notice of release dates. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, we will notify you of the change and the reasons for the change will be explained, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

## 6 . How the output is created

From 2013 data onwards, divorces have been extracted from HM Courts and Tribunals Service's FamilyMan case management system and sent to us electronically. Divorces in 2013 and 2014 were received in annual files. From the 2015 data year, divorce data were received monthly, three months after the end of the month to enable timely quality assurance. Divorces in 2018 are now received 15 days after the end of the month. A series of checks are performed on the monthly data and any queries are addressed. The final annual dataset is then received three months after the year end.

Prior to the 2013 data year, divorce statistics for England and Wales were derived from data provided on the D105 form used to record decree absolutes. These paper forms were sent to us by the courts.

Most figures are based on the basic data supplied, however, some are based on derived information:

- duration of marriage to decree absolute: derived from date of marriage and date of decree absolute
- age at divorce: this is derived from age at marriage and duration of marriage – from this an age (at last birthday) at the date of divorce is derived
- age of child at petition: derived up until the 2015 data year from date of birth of child and date of petition (since 2014 it has not been mandatory for couples divorcing to provide dates of birth of children, consequently we no longer publish statistics on children)

Divorce rates are published for England and Wales (combined). The rate is the number of people divorcing per thousand married males and females and uses [population estimates by marital status](#).

## 7 . Validation and quality assurance

### Accuracy

(The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.)

The information on the divorce form is supplied by the petitioner and respondent in fulfilling the legal requirements for filing a petition. Since the information is required for a legal process it may be presumed that the quality of the data is good, especially as the petitioner must swear under oath (an affidavit) that the information supplied is correct. There is no routine independent statistical verification of the data, but editing checks are carried out to detect clerical, coding and keying errors.

We conduct quality assurance tasks throughout the year on the dataset in preparation for the release of annual figures. These include:

- completeness checks, which consider whether any records may be missing; this is based on a comparison with Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) divorce figures for the same period
- inconsistency checks within the dataset to ensure minimal internal errors

During the quality assurance of the annual dataset, further checks are carried out, including frequency checks and comparisons with previous year's data as well as checks for duplicates.

The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) (13 March 2014) included provisions to streamline court processes in proceedings for a decree of divorce, nullity of marriage, or judicial separation (or, in relation to a civil partnership, for a dissolution, nullity or separation order) by removing the requirement for the court to consider whether it should exercise any of its powers under the Children Act 1989. Arrangements for children can be decided at any time through separate proceedings under the Children Act 1989. Consequently, the recording of information on children at divorce is no longer a mandatory part of the divorce process. Following an assessment of data quality, statistics relating to children of divorcing couples were discontinued from 2015 onwards.

Revisions of divorce statistics do not occur frequently, but sometimes it is necessary to revise the statistics following improvements made to the data collection and quality assurance methods. In January 2010, we released revised divorce statistics for 2003 to 2007 following the identification of duplicates in the dataset. Duplicates were identified because of discrepancy work investigating the differences that existed between Office for National Statistics (ONS) and MoJ divorce statistics. MoJ also revised their figures back to 2003.

Further quality work was carried out later in 2010 in preparation for an exercise to compare ONS divorce records with MoJ systems to try to work out the remaining differences. This work alerted us to the fact there were still duplicates within our divorce datasets. It was later determined that the original duplicate check carried out on the datasets had not been sufficient.

New duplicate checks were introduced onto the system and all duplicate checks were run on data back to 2003. In February 2011, when 2009 data were published, we revised divorce data back to 2003 again. A [statement about the differences](#) that existed between ONS and MoJ divorce figures was published in June 2012.

Following a [consultation](#) surrounding the population estimates by marital status in summer 2014, changes were made to the methodology used to produce the estimates for England and Wales, for the years 2002 onwards. The method now uses the marital status distribution from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and applies this to published population estimates (by five-year age group and sex) for England and Wales. Annex B in the [consultation response document](#) provides more information on the methodology. [Population estimates by marital status](#) for the years 2002 to 2010 were revised and published in July 2015, alongside new estimates for 2011 to 2014. Because of the change in the methodology, revised divorce rates for England and Wales for 2002 to 2012 were published in November 2015.

The court system in England and Wales records all divorces taking place in England and Wales, regardless of the usual residence of the two parties. The marriage can have taken place abroad but it must be legally recognised in the UK and one of the parties must have a permanent home in England and Wales. It is possible that some people who are usually resident in England and Wales may undertake divorce proceedings in another country, so are not included in the divorce statistics for England and Wales. Similarly, some people who are overseas residents may divorce in England and Wales. Although there are estimates for marriages abroad (using data from the International Passenger Survey on intention of travel to get married), there is no such equivalent for divorces abroad. It is likely that the numbers of divorces taking place abroad are low (as divorce is not open to those without a connection to another country), so the exclusion of such divorces will not impact the main uses of the data.

## Coherence and comparability

(Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain, for example, geographic level.)

Methods for compiling divorce statistics and the data collected at divorce have remained relatively unchanged for many years and time series data are available on a comparable basis back to 1858 in some tables. It is not possible for some tables to include more historic data because not all data are available electronically to reprocess.

Divorces taking place in Scotland and Northern Ireland are recorded by the courts in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Comparability between countries within the UK is possible for divorces as they are recognised across the UK. We quality assure divorce data for England and Wales and coordinate and publish statistics for the whole of the UK, with breakdowns for each constituent country. Although both the [Scottish Government](#) and [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#) publish regular divorce statistics for their own countries, by collating all the data in our [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#) figures can be easily compared across countries.

We provide divorce data to [Eurostat](#) each year to allow them to compare divorce figures across different European countries.

Comparability is maximised by the following:

- divorce statistics published by ONS, Scottish Government and NISRA are all produced using date of decree absolute
- divorce statistics published by ONS, Scottish Government and NISRA are compiled from returns of “Decrees made Absolute” supplied by the courts and include nullities of marriage; this is also the case for many countries internationally, including New Zealand and Australia

MoJ also publish a summary of divorce figures as part of their [Family court statistics quarterly](#), which are used by court staff, for case management purposes. MoJ analyses divorce data electronically through HM Courts and Tribunals Service’s FamilyMan system.

The number of divorces indicated by ONS and MoJ statistics, while similar, do not match exactly. Some of the difference is due to not counting precisely the same cases. For example:

- ONS divorce figures include annulments while MoJ figures do not; the number of annulments in 2017 published by MoJ was 332
- since 2007, divorce figures published by MoJ have included dissolutions of civil partnerships, which are not included in our figures; the number of [civil partnership dissolutions in 2017](#) published by ONS was 1,217

Using figures that are as comparable as possible (totals including annulments and civil partnership dissolutions), would result in figures of 103,224 and 103,230 being reported by ONS and MoJ respectively, a difference of only 6 (0.01%). These are likely to be due to differences in the date when the data are extracted.

Prior to the 2013 data year, some other differences also existed from the way data were collected and processed. These include:

- differences in the number of late divorce records excluded from both MoJ and our annual datasets
- differences in the process to remove duplicate records
- differences between the number of records entered onto the FamilyMan system and the number of paper records received by us from courts

In June 2012, together with MoJ, we published a joint [statement on differences](#) between these figures that existed at the time and worked closely together to reconcile the two sets of statistics as far as possible.

Comparisons of divorce data with survey data containing estimates of the numbers of divorcees in England and Wales are possible, however, these figures are not directly comparable as surveys estimate the current number of divorcees rather than the number of divorces that took place during a particular year.

## 8 . Concepts and definitions

(Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output and a description of the classifications used in the output.)

Information on the legislation governing divorces is contained within our [User guide to divorce statistics](#).

There are no classifications used in the compilation of our divorce statistics.



## 9 . Other information

### Output quality trade-offs

(Trade-offs are the extent to which different dimensions of quality are balanced against each other.)

Prior to the 2013 data year, when divorce records began to be received electronically, each year a certain number of divorces were not included in the published figures. This was because the decree absolute paper forms were received later than the date on which the annual dataset was taken. A table published in our [User guide to divorce statistics](#) shows the difference between the number of divorces stored on our database and the number included in our publications each year. Although this means some divorces were not included in the statistics, it was a necessary compromise needed to publish timely data. The electronic receipt of data now means that we receive almost all divorces in a year in time for the annual publication.

### Assessment of user needs and perceptions

(The processes for finding out about uses and users, and their views on the statistical products.)

We welcome your feedback on the content, format and relevance of our releases and encourage you to send feedback via email to [vsob@ons.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gov.uk).

Feedback is requested with all emails sent by customer service teams within Vital Statistics Output Branch.

Feedback is also received through our regular attendance at user group meetings and conferences.

A consultation to understand [user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics](#) following the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples was published in October 2013. Information provided was used to help us review our marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics to meet user needs as much as possible. A [summary of the responses to the consultation and future plans](#) was published.

## 10 . Sources for further information or advice

### Accessibility and clarity

(Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.)

Our recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV, Excel, and [NOMIS explorable datasets](#). Our website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances, other software may be used, or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on our website, but not produced by us, or referenced on our website but stored elsewhere, may vary. For further information please contact [vsob@ons.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gov.uk).

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the following links:

- [terms and conditions](#) (for data on the website)
- [accessibility](#)

Special extracts and tabulations of divorces data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and our [charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch via email to [vsob@ons.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gov.uk) or by telephone on +44 (0)1329 444110. We also publish [user requested data](#).

## Useful links

Statistics on [divorces in England and Wales](#) are published by sex, age and marital status at the time of marriage, duration of marriage to decree absolute, age at divorce and the grounds for divorce. Our [User guide to divorce statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to divorces.

Annual divorce figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital statistics: population and health reference tables](#). [Scottish Government](#) provides divorce statistics for Scotland. [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) provides divorce statistics for Northern Ireland.

[Family court statistics quarterly](#) published by the Ministry of Justice, provides statistics on the volume of divorce cases received and processed through the family court system of England and Wales.

Further related releases produced by Office for National statistics include [marriages](#), [civil partnership formations and dissolutions](#), [families and households](#) and [population estimates by marital status](#).