

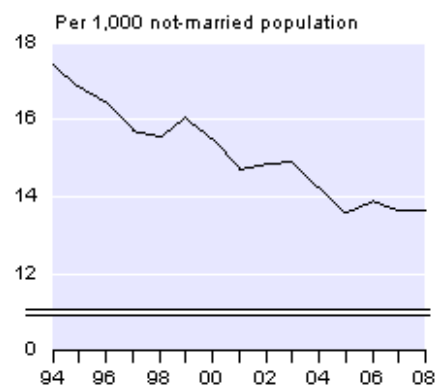
Embargoed until 10:45am – 5 May 2009

## Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ended December 2008

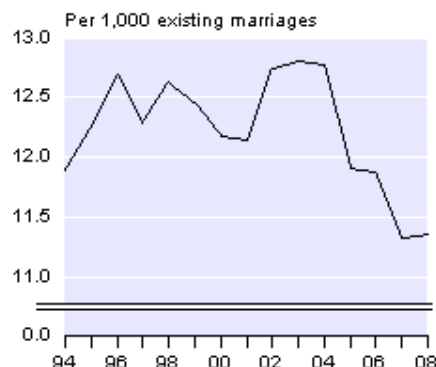
### Highlights

- 21,900 marriages were registered to New Zealand residents during the December 2008 year.
- 2,000 marriages were registered to overseas residents in 2008.
- The general marriage rate was 13.7 marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over in 2008.
- 327 resident civil unions were registered in 2008, of which 78 percent were same-sex unions.
- 78 civil unions were registered to overseas residents in 2008.
- 9,700 orders for dissolution of marriage were granted in New Zealand during the December 2008 year.
- There were 11.3 divorces for every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in 2008.

**General Marriage Rate**  
1994–2008



**Divorce Rate**  
1994–2008



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See also [Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ended December 2008 – Media release](#).

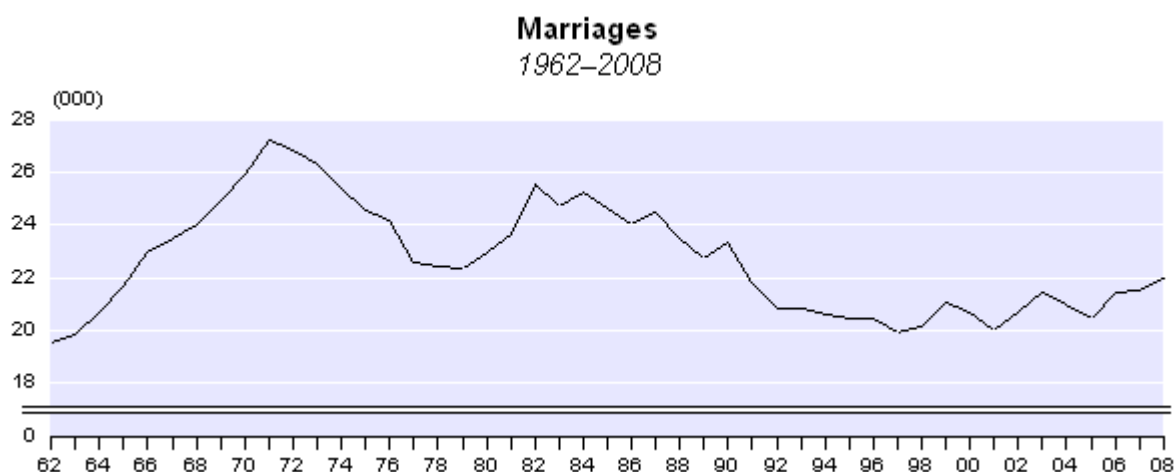
## Commentary

### Total marriages

There were 21,900 marriages registered to New Zealand residents in the December 2008 year, compared with 21,500 in 2007. The increase in the number of resident marriages was due to an increase in the number of first marriages from 14,400 to 14,800.

A further 2,000 marriages were registered to overseas residents in 2008, the same number as in each of the previous three years.

Over the last decade, the average annual number of resident marriages has been around 21,000. This compares with an average annual number of 25,000 from 1969–1978.



The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) was 13.7 per 1,000 in 2008, similar to the rate of 13.6 per 1,000 in 2007. However, the rate has declined in the last decade from 15.6 per 1,000 in 1998 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 the December 2008 year, 43 percent of marriages were celebrated in the first three months of the year. The most popular day of the week to wed was Saturday, when about 60 percent of all marriages were celebrated. The most popular day in 2008 was Saturday 23 February, with 630 marriages celebrated.

On Thursday 14 February 2008 (Valentine's Day), around 80 couples married, compared with an average of 30 weddings on the other Thursdays in February. Another popular day in February 2008 was Friday 29 February (leap day). On this day, there were 230 marriages celebrated compared with an average of 130 on other Fridays in February.

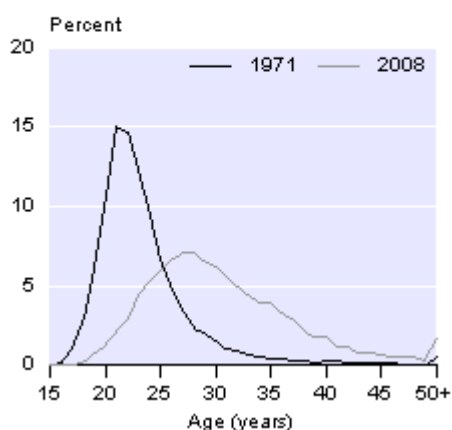
In contrast, only 13 percent of marriages registered in 2008 took place in June, July and August. However, one day within these winter months was popular with marrying couples – 290 marriages were celebrated on Friday 8 August 2008, or 08/08/08, compared with an average of 40 marriages on other Fridays in August. This date may have been popular because the number eight is considered lucky by some cultures or individuals, or because the date is easy to remember.

## Age at first marriage

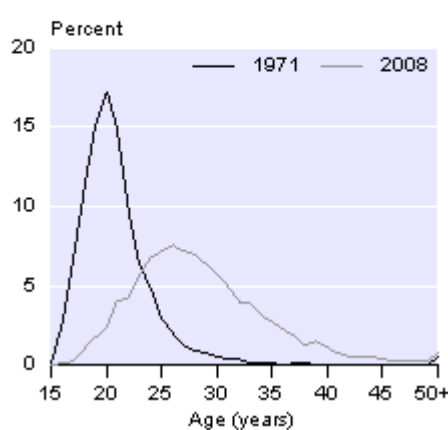
New Zealanders are marrying later than in the past. In 2008, the median age at first marriage was 29.9 and 28.2 years for men and women, respectively – up from 28.7 and 26.7 years in 1998. Although the median age at first marriage has increased over the decade, most of the increase occurred before 2004 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 2008. Teenagers comprised 36 percent of women who married for the first time in 1971, but only 3 percent in 2008 when 500 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 1968, this gap averaged 2.3 years, but by 2008 it had narrowed to 1.8 years.

**Age Distribution of First Marriages: Men**  
1971 and 2008



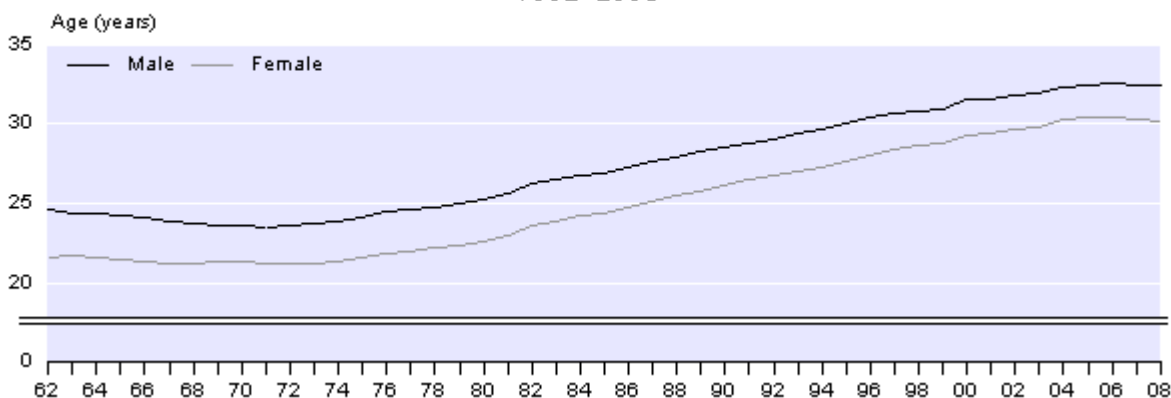
**Age Distribution of First Marriages: Women**  
1971 and 2008



## Age at marriage

Among all marriages (first marriages and remarriages), the median age at marriage has risen steadily since the early 1970s. Median age at marriage reached historic lows of 23.5 years for men and 21.2 years for women in 1971, before rising to 32.5 years for men and 30.2 years for women in 2008. These median ages have been relatively constant since 2004.

**Median Age at Marriage**  
1962–2008



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 1988 to 32 years in 2007 and from 25 to 29 years for women. In England and Wales, the median age for men increased from 28 years in 1991 to 34 years in 2007 and from 26 to 31 years for women.

## **Remarriages**

The number of New Zealand resident marriages where one or both partners had previously been married was 7,100 in 2008, the same as in 2007. The proportion of all marriages that were remarriages in 2008 was 33 percent. 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. In 1971, just 16 percent of marriages involved the remarriage of one or both partners.

About 90 percent of those remarrying in 2008 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 2008, 22 percent of men and 20 percent of women were previously divorced. About half of divorced people who remarry marry another divorced person.

In 2008, the median ages of divorced and widowed men remarrying were 46.7 and 61.9 years, respectively, while the median ages of divorced and widowed women remarrying were 43.6 and 56.4 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 one in seven adults (aged 15 years and over) who were in partnerships were not legally married. By 2006, this figure had increased to around one in five. The proportion of partnered people who are not legally married decreases with age. Among partnered people aged 15–44 years, 35 percent were not legally married in 2006. This compares with 10 percent for partnered men and women aged 45 years and over. Among partnered women aged 15–19 years, nine out of 10 were living in a de facto union at the time of the 2006 Census.

## **Civil unions**

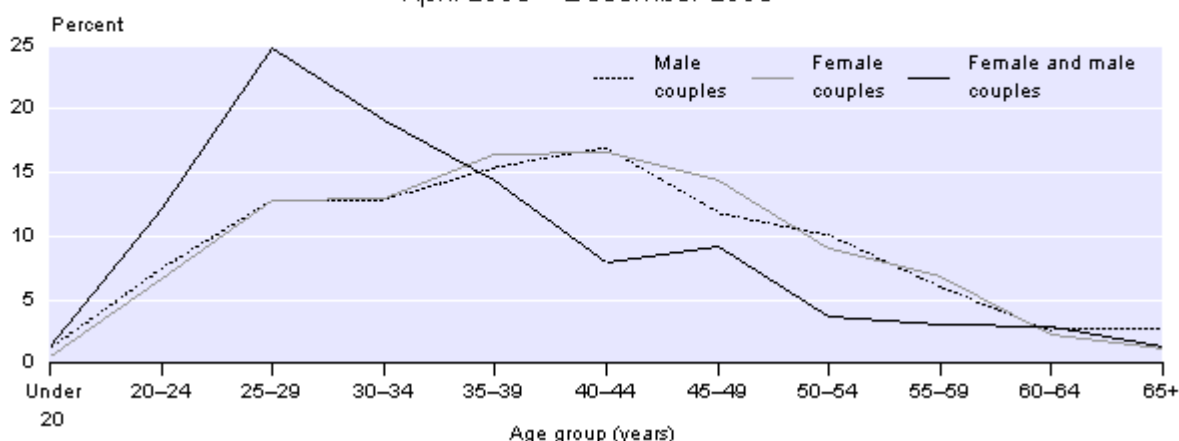
The Civil Union Act 2004 came into force on 26 April 2005 and the first ceremonies were celebrated on 29 April 2005. This Act introduced a new form of legal relationship. Two people aged 18 years and over, whether of opposite or the same sex, can enter into a civil union provided they are not currently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

In 2008, 327 civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents. These comprised 256 same-sex unions (111 male and 145 female) and 71 opposite-sex unions. There were no transfers to a civil union from marriage and two transfers to a marriage from a civil union. In addition, 78 civil unions were registered to overseas residents, bringing the total number of registrations to 405. About one in five civil unions involved overseas residents in 2008, compared with roughly one in ten 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 2008 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 both men and women registering a same-sex civil union was 40 years. The median ages for opposite-sex civil unions were 34 years for men and 32 years for women – slightly older than the median age for marriage (33 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 2008*



Opposite-sex civil unions tend to be concentrated in the younger age groups; 44 percent were aged 25–34 years and only 28 percent were aged 40 years and over. Same-sex civil unions had a broader age range. The 35–39-year and 40–44-year age groups were the most common, but these represented just 33 percent of those registering a same-sex civil union. Half 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 (40 percent) than same-sex male couples (26 percent). In 38 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.

## Provisional quarterly civil unions and marriages

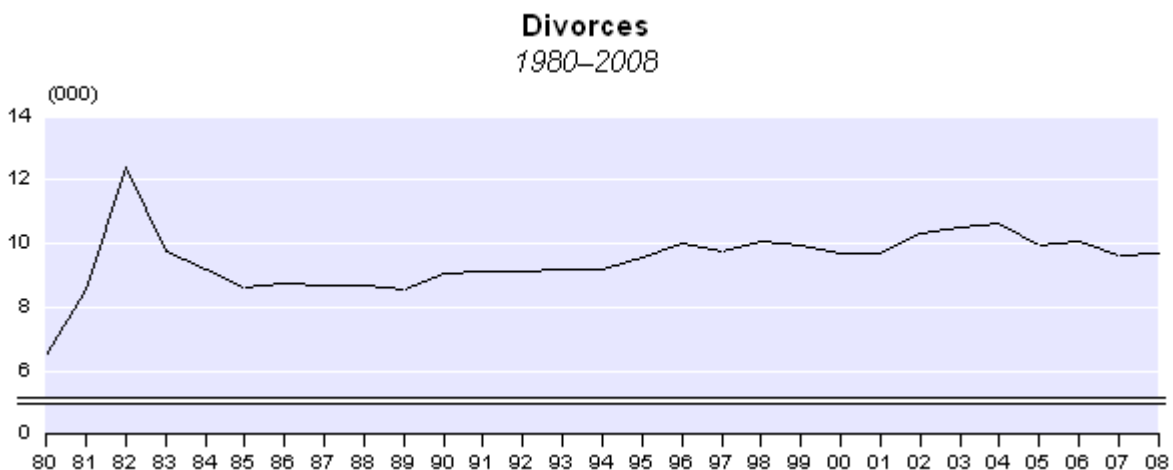
There were 1,646 civil unions registered between April 2005 and March 2009. These comprised 1,330 same-sex unions (594 male and 736 female), 312 opposite-sex unions and four transfers from marriage. These registrations include New Zealand residents and overseas visitors. Figures for January 2009–March 2009 are provisional.

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

## Total divorces

In 1981, the number of divorces rose sharply following the passing of the Family Proceedings Act 1980, which allowed for the dissolution of marriage on the grounds of irreconcilable differences. Divorces recorded a temporary high of 12,400 in 1982. Subsequently, the number fell to a low of 8,600 in 1989. In 2008, the Family Court granted 9,700 divorces, slightly below the annual average of 10,000 for the last decade.

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



## Divorce rate

For every 1,000 estimated existing marriages in New Zealand in 2008, there were 11.3 divorces, the same as in 2007. New Zealand's divorce rate is comparable with Australia (12.0 for women and 12.2 for men in 2006) and England and Wales (11.9 in 2007).

## Duration of marriage of those divorcing

Couples who had been married for 5–9 years accounted for one-quarter of all divorces in 2008. The next most common marriage duration before divorce was 10–14 years (18 percent), followed by 15–19 years (15 percent). Twelve percent of people divorcing had been married for four years or less.

Half of marriages dissolved in 2008 had lasted 13.4 years or more, compared with the median duration of 12.6 years for marriages dissolved in 1998.

## 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 2008 was 44.5 years for men and 41.9 years for women. Divorcees in 2008 were, on average, about four years older than those whose marriages dissolved in 1998. The median ages then were 40.5 years for men and 37.9 years for women.

## Marriages ending in divorce

Annual divorce statistics do not give a complete picture of the number of marriages ending in divorce. Analysis of divorce statistics by year of marriage shows that about one-third of New Zealanders who married in 1983 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). For those married in 1978 and 1968, the corresponding figures were 32 and 26 percent, respectively.

## Divorces involving people with children

Less than half of all marriages dissolved in 2008 involved people with children (under 17 years). The proportion of divorces involving children fell from 49 percent in 1998 to 43 percent in 2008. The number of divorces involving children was 4,900 in 1998 and 4,200 in 2008. Fewer children were involved in 2008 (7,600) than in 1998 (9,400).

Of those divorces involving children in 2008, there was an average of 1.8 children per divorce. This figure has changed little during the past decade. Less than half (47 percent) of children involved were under 10 years of age in 2008.

## Additional tables

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

## Infoshare database

Infoshare is a free online database that gives access to a range of time-series data: <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Infoshare/database/snz/databaseTree.asp>. Infoshare contains a number of data series on marriages and divorces, available through 'Vital statistics – marriages' and 'Demography marriage rates' (under 'Population' on the 'Browse' page).

## Final figures

Marriage and divorce rates for 2008 and civil union numbers for January 2009–March 2009 stated in this release are provisional. All other figures in this release are final.

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## Next release ...

*Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ending December 2009* will be released on 5 May 2010.

## 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.

### 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.

### Rounding

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

### More information

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

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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, 1961–2008
2. Median age at marriage by previous marital status, 1961–2008
3. Divorces and divorce rates, 1961–2008
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce, 1987–2008
5. Divorces involving people with children aged under 17 years, 1987–2008
6. Civil unions by relationship type, 2005–2008
7. Civil unions by age group, 2005–2008