

# User guide to divorce statistics

Supporting information for divorce statistics in England and Wales. Figures are based on information recorded during the divorce process.

Contact:  
Paula Guy  
pop.info@ons.gov.uk  
+44 1329 444661

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# 1 . Introduction

We produce demographic statistics on divorces taking place in England and Wales, which are published as [National Statistics](#). This guarantees that these outputs have been produced to high professional standards as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and have been produced free from any political interference.

Divorces taking place in England and Wales are recorded by the courts onto [HM Courts and Tribunals Service's](#) (HMCTS') Core Case Data (CCD) management system and sent to us electronically for the production and analysis of statistics.

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 final order), or annulled following a petition for nullity and the awarding of a decree of nullity (see [Glossary](#)).

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/or Wales.

Our [Divorces in England and Wales Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#) contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how they compare with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

From the 2014 data year onwards, the format of annual divorce publications changed. We now publish a selection of summary datasets, which provide an extensive time series for comparison. Alongside these, we also publish [explorable datasets](#), which can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for a particular calendar year. A consultation, [Understanding user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics given the introduction of marriage of same-sex couples](#), was published in October 2013. The [response to this consultation \(PDF, 102KB\)](#), published in April 2014, detailed these changes.

Prior to the 2014 data year, divorce statistics were published as a set of packages. More information relating to each package is available in the "metadata" tab at the front of the data tables. These packages were:

- [Number of divorces, age at divorce, marital status before marriage and reason](#)
- [Age at marriage and duration of marriage and cohort analyses](#)
- [Children of divorced couples](#)

Comparable statistics for England and Wales for earlier years are published:

- from 1995 to 2007 in [Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics](#) (series FM2)
- from 1974 to 1994 in the annual reference volume, Marriage and Divorce Statistics (series FM2)
- from 1858 (the first year during which a decree of divorce could be petitioned for and granted in a civil court within England and Wales) to 1974 in the Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales
- from 1858 to 1983 in the volume, Marriage and Divorce Statistics (Series FM2 Number 16)

Annual divorce statistics for the UK and its constituent countries can be found in our [Vital statistics in the UK: births, deaths and marriages dataset](#). The [Scottish Government](#) provides divorce statistics for Scotland. The [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) (NISRA) provides divorce statistics for Northern Ireland.

Divorce statistics on case progression are available from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in [Family Court Statistics Quarterly](#). The MoJ analyses divorce data electronically through the HMCTS CCD management system since 2020 (FamilyMan system for 2013 to 2019)

## 2 . Legislation

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 was an Act of Parliament passed by the UK government. The Act reformed the law on divorce, moving litigation from the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts to the civil courts and widening the availability of divorce.

The [Divorce Reform Act 1969](#) came into effect in England and Wales on 1 January 1971. The Act, consolidated in the [Matrimonial Causes Act 1973](#), made it possible for divorce to be petitioned for on the couple's separation. The Act attempted to remove the concepts of the guilty party and the matrimonial offence by introducing a single ground for divorce: the irretrievable breakdown of marriage. Such a breakdown can be established by the petitioner proving one or more of five facts. The first three facts (adultery, unreasonable behaviour and desertion) are the former matrimonial offences. Two separation criteria were introduced for the first time by the Act, allowing divorce either by mutual consent or on the application of the petitioner alone.

The [Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984](#) came into effect in England and Wales on 12 October 1984. The Act made two changes. The first replaced the discretionary time bar (minimum time interval between the date of marriage and being able to file a petition for divorce) of three years by an absolute time bar of one year. No petition can now be filed within the first year of marriage. The second change meant the Act no longer required courts to try to place the divorced spouses in the financial position they would have been in had the marriage not broken down.

The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#) enabled same-sex couples in England and Wales to marry from 29 March 2014. The Act also has several related provisions, including for those in a civil partnership to convert that relationship to a marriage if they choose to do so, and provisions that enable a person to change their legal gender without ending their existing marriage. These provisions came into force on 10 December 2014. The Act does not remove the availability of civil partnerships for same-sex couples. The first divorces recorded between same-sex couples in England and Wales were in 2015.

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.

The [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) received Royal Assent on 25 June 2020 and came into effect on 6 April 2022. The Act revises the legal process in England and Wales for married couples to obtain a divorce or judicial separation and for civil partners to dissolve their civil partnership or obtain a separation. It therefore amends certain provisions set out in the [Matrimonial Causes Act 1973](#) and the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#), which are the main statutes governing these proceedings. [The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) removed the requirement to establish facts. One or both parties to a marriage may now apply to the court for a divorce order, which dissolves the marriage on the grounds that the marriage has broken down irretrievably.

The [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022](#) received Royal Assent in April 2022 and is planned to come into effect on 27 February 2023. The purpose of the Act is to address the practice of child marriage in England and Wales. The Act raises the minimum age of marriage and civil partnership to 18 years in England and Wales. This brings an end to provisions allowing for those aged 16 to 17 years to marry or enter a civil partnership with parental or judicial consent.

The anticipated effect of this change on common law means that any marriages that take place overseas, or in Scotland or Northern Ireland, involving those aged under 18 years where one of the parties is domiciled in England and Wales, will not be legally recognised in England and Wales. This change in recognition also applies to civil partnerships. This does not affect the validity of any marriages or civil partnerships entered into before the Act comes into force.

The Act also makes it illegal for a person to arrange the marriage of a person aged under 18 years in England and Wales in those circumstances where that is not already illegal.

### 3 . Information collected and derived

For the 2020 data year onwards, divorce data have been extracted from the HM Courts and Tribunals Service's (HMCTS) Core Case Data (CCD) management system. Information about age and previous marital status is no longer collected during the divorce and dissolution process so the extract excludes these variables. Columns in data tables based on age and/or previous marital status have not been updated for data years 2020 onwards.

For the years 2013 to 2019, divorce data were extracted from the HMCTS FamilyMan case management system and sent to us electronically in an annual file.

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.

From the 2015 data year, we moved to a monthly receipt of electronic divorce data for quality assurance. These data were received three months after the month end. From the 2018 data year, data are now received within 15 days after the end of the month. A series of checks are performed on the data received and any queries are addressed. The final annual dataset is received three months after the year end.

The following is a summary of the data analysed in the tables.

Supplied by petitioner and respondent:

- date of marriage

Supplied by the court:

- date petition filed and date of decree absolute
- facts proven and class(es) of decree
- dissolution type (same-sex couple or opposite-sex couple): this has been supplied since 2014 following the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples

Information derived:

- duration of marriage to decree absolute, derived from date of marriage and date of decree absolute

Since 2014, it has not been mandatory for couples divorcing to provide details of children -- a consequence of the Children and Families Act 2012. Following an assessment of data quality, statistics relating to children of divorcing couples were discontinued from 2015 onwards. Data on children have not been recorded on the divorce application since August 2017.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has responsibility for policy and legislation on divorces. Demographic information collected by HMCTS is analysed and published by us. The MoJ relies on these analyses to inform policy, financial and workload decisions.

## 4 . Accuracy of information

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.

Throughout the year, we conduct quality assurance tasks on the dataset, in preparation for the release of annual figures. These include completeness checks, which consider whether any records may be missing, and inconsistency checks within the dataset, which ensure minimal internal errors.

During the quality assurance of the annual dataset, further checks are carried out. This includes frequency checks, comparisons with the previous year's data, checks for duplicates as well as comparisons with the number of divorces reported by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

The numbers of divorces, as indicated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and MoJ statistics, while similar, do not match exactly. From the 2013 data year, we have compiled divorce statistics from electronic extracts of divorces taken directly from the FamilyMan system (2013 to 2019) and Core Case Data (CCD) management system (since 2020) used by the courts. This has helped to minimise the difference between the two sets of statistics. However, some differences remain because we do not count precisely the same cases. For example, the ONS divorce figures include annulments while the MoJ figures do not and since 2007, the divorce figures published by the MoJ have included dissolutions of civil partnerships, which are not included in our figures.

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 ONS and MoJ 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 the ONS from courts

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

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. Table 1 shows the difference between the number of divorces stored on our database and the number included in our publications each year for 2000 to 2012. This meant that some divorces were not included in the statistics, which was a compromise that had to be made to publish timely data. The electronic receipt of data means that nearly all divorces in a year are now received in time for our annual publication.

Table 1: Divorce decrees made absolute not included in the published data, 2000 to 2012, England and Wales

Year of decree absolute	Database <sup>1</sup>	Published tables	Differences
2000	141,223	141,135	88
2001	143,854	143,818	36
2002	147,791	147,735	56
2003	153,073	153,065	8
2004	152,926	152,923	3
2005	141,326	141,322	4
2006	132,147	132,140	7
2007	128,138	128,131	7
2008	121,720	121,708	12
2009	114,149	113,949	200 <sup>2</sup>
2010	119,669	119,589	80
2011	117,575	117,558	17
2012	118,320	118,140	180

Source: Office for National Statistics – User guide to divorce statistics

#### Notes

1. Counts taken on 26 April 2017.
2. 194 decree absolute forms for 2009 were received in April 2011 after the publication of our 2009 divorce statistics on 17 February 2011. Our divorce statistics for 2009 have not been revised to incorporate these late divorce forms since the number is relatively small (less than 0.2% of all decree absolutes for 2009) and the impact on statistics is negligible.
3. We have made a minor change to the number of decree absolutes not included in published data for 2009. This figure should read 200<sup>2</sup> and not 2002 as previously published. This was because of an error caused by our tabulation software when reading the figure.

## 5 . Missing information and corrections

Prior to the 2014 data year, in cases where one or more of the items of information collected was found to be missing, the procedure adopted was:

- age at marriage was imputed using a series of look-up tables, depending on whether the age of one or both parties was missing
- bridegrooms were assumed to be single men who had never been married and brides were assumed to be single women who had never been married
- in rare cases where date of marriage was missing and age at divorce could not be derived, this was recorded as "not stated" in published tables

The level of imputation, or replacement of missing data with substitutes, for age at marriage and marital status at marriage increased between 2003 and 2013. During the divorce process, these fields are taken from the marriage certificate supplied by the petitioner. Some marriage certificates relating to marriages that took place outside of England and Wales do not contain these variables. Marital status and age at marriage are also not mandatory fields in the divorce process; therefore, they are not always collected by the courts. For the 2014 data onwards, the data are no longer imputed. Not stated categories have been added to published tables instead.

From the 2014 data year, we have seen increases in the proportion of records where the age at marriage of one or both members of a divorcing couple is not available; this information is required for calculating age at divorce. Consequently, any calculations and analysis based on age at divorce exclude these records. From the 2020 data year onwards, information about age and previous marital status is not available as it is no longer collected during the divorce and dissolution process.

Table 2: Level of imputation required for certain variables, 2001 to 2013, England and Wales

Year of decree absolute	Percentage of records requiring imputation		
	Age of husband and/or wife	Marital status of husband	Marital status of wife
2001	3.4	4.2	4.1
2002	3.6	4.2	4.0
2003	4.0	4.4	4.0
2004	4.2	4.6	4.2
2005	4.0	5.1	4.4
2006	4.0	5.3	4.7
2007	4.3	5.7	5.1
2008	5.1	6.6	5.9
2009	5.7	7.1	6.3
2010	6.2	8.0	7.2
2011	7.8	10.3	9.3
2012	8.4	12.4	11.3
2013	8.1	13.0	11.8

Source: Office for National Statistics – User guide to divorce statistics



## 6 . Base populations

The population figures used to calculate rates are from our [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales bulletin](#).

Following a [consultation](#) on 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 year 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 \(DOC, 320KB\)](#) provides more information on the methodology.

[Population estimates by marital status](#) for the years 2002 to 2010 were subsequently revised and published in July 2015 alongside new population estimates by marital status for the years 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 differences resulting from the change in methodology are explained in our [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2014 bulletin](#) and within the associated tables.

Population estimates by marital status for the years 2012 to 2017 were further revised in September 2019 following the re-weighting of the LFS in 2018.

The population estimates used are the most up-to-date when rates are published and are detailed alongside the published tables. Our [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#) provides more detail on the methodology. Any revisions to divorce rates resulting from revisions to the population estimates by marital status are detailed in the footnotes on affected tables.

## 7 . Analyses by area

We are unable to produce divorce statistics by area of residence because the divorce data provided to us by the courts do not contain information on the area of residence of the parties.

Since 2018, [Family Court Statistics Quarterly](#), published by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), has included a CSV file containing the 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.

## 8 . Rates

Divorce rates are calculated using the most up-to-date estimates of the population by marital status available at the time of publication. Tables that include rates provide information on the specific denominators used to calculate each rate.

The following rates are provided in our divorces statistics tables.

### Denominators used in calculating rates

#### Rate

Persons divorcing per 1,000 married population.

#### Corresponding denominator

Married persons (aged 16 years and over).

**Rate**

Males divorcing per 1,000 married male population.

**Corresponding denominator**

Married males (aged 16 years and over).

**Rate**

Females divorcing per 1,000 married female population.

**Corresponding denominator**

Married females (aged 16 years and over).

**Rate**

Males divorcing per 1,000 married males, by age group.

**Corresponding denominator**

Married males, by age group.

**Rate**

Females divorcing per 1,000 married females, by age group.

**Corresponding denominator**

Married females, by age group.

## 9 . Cohort analyses

Most divorce statistics are presented based on the calendar year in which the divorce was granted. An alternative approach is to present divorce statistics based on the year of marriage or the year of birth. In this case, a cohort is a group of people either married in the same year or born in the same year. Such tables can provide estimates of the proportion of people married or born in a particular year who divorce by a particular anniversary or age.

### Analysis by birth cohort

[Tables 9a and 9b: Proportions of men and women who had ever divorced by age and birth cohort](#)

Using males ([Table 9a](#)) as an example, the numbers of divorces each year to men of each age are combined with mid-year population estimates for males by age, to estimate the proportion of men born in each year who have ever divorced by each birthday. A standard life table methodology is used to calculate probabilities of divorce, which are then applied to a hypothetical stationary population. This method enables the proportion ever divorced by each exact birthday to be estimated. By accounting for the latest population estimates rather than simply the number of men born in a particular year, it also takes into account changes in the sizes of cohorts since birth, owing to death and migration.

Tables 9a and 9b were formerly Tables 3a and 3b of the [Age at and duration of marriage and cohort analyses](#) divorce package. From our 2015 divorces publication onwards, figures are based on both divorces of opposite- and same-sex couples. It has not been possible to update these tables for the 2020 data year onwards as information about age is no longer collected during the divorce and dissolution process.

## Analysis by marriage cohort

### [Table 8a: Cumulative percentage of marriages ending in divorce by year of marriage and by anniversary](#)

To produce [Table 8a](#), the number of marriages in a given year is used as the denominator and the numbers of divorces in subsequent years to couples married in the original year are used as the numerators. Duration of marriage is estimated by differencing the year and month of marriage and the year and month of divorce, as this gives a more precise measure of duration than just differencing the years.

For example, the proportion of marriages in 1990 ending in divorce up to the fifth anniversary is calculated as the number of couples divorcing in England and Wales between 1990 and 1995 who married in 1990 and who had not reached their fifth anniversary before they divorced, divided by the total number of couples marrying in England and Wales during 1990.

Table 8a is based on several assumptions that should be considered when using the figures.

#### **Assumption one**

Couples marry in the country in which they are resident (for example, there are no marriages abroad or in Scotland or Northern Ireland by couples resident in England and Wales and no marriages in England and Wales to non-residents).

In practice, the estimated number of marriages abroad or in the rest of the UK by couples resident in England and Wales has exceeded the estimated number of marriages to non-residents over the past decade. Marriages occurring abroad are taken into account in [population estimates by marital status](#) but not in this cohort table, as estimated divorces abroad are not available. This could lead to over-estimation of the proportion of marriages ending in divorce, as couples marrying abroad would be included in the divorce figures if they divorce but would not be included in the marriage figures.

#### **Assumption two**

Zero migration to and from England and Wales, for example, those resident in England and Wales have not emigrated since marrying, and no married couples migrate to England and Wales and then divorce in England and Wales.

#### **Assumption three**

A marriage can only end in divorce.

[Table 8a](#) does not take into account that some marriages have ended by death and are therefore no longer at risk of ending in divorce. This will have the greatest impact at the longer marriage durations, where spouses are likely to be older. For example, if 25% of couples marrying in a particular year had divorced by 40 years later, that does not imply that 75% are still married, as a proportion of individuals will have been widowed.

From 2014 onwards, figures are based on both marriages and divorces of opposite- and same-sex couples. We continue to monitor the number of marriages of same-sex couples that end in divorce to assess whether we are able to produce separate tables showing the percentage of marriages that end in divorce for opposite- and same-sex couples.

[Table 8a](#) was formerly Table 2 of the [Age at and duration of marriage and cohort analyses](#) divorce package.

## 10 . Cumulative percentage of marriages ending in divorce

The cumulative percentage of marriages ending in divorce or death by anniversary is a table that we periodically produce. The table uses mortality and divorce rates for a single calendar year to produce a single figure for the percentage of marriages ending in divorce. The most recent version of the table (Table 2a) was published in our [Divorces in England and Wales, 2012 \(Age at and duration of marriage and cohort analyses\)](#). The table was produced using 2010 mortality and divorce rates. A [similar table using 2005 rates](#) is available.

This period table takes divorce rates at all years of marriage from a calendar year of divorces data and provides a single figure summarising the proportion of marriages ending in divorce for that calendar year. The table differs from cohort Table 8 published annually, which uses all years of marriage and divorce data available and provides the proportion of marriages ending in divorce by year of marriage.

A complex method was used to calculate the period table showing the cumulative percentage of marriages ending in divorce. Firstly, the married population by duration of marriage was calculated for 2010. This involves the following stages.

### Stage 1

Obtain the married population by sex and single year of age from published 2001 mid-year marital status estimates. The 2001 mid-year estimates are the closest to the 2001 Census base and should therefore be the best estimate of the population by marital status.

### Stage 2

Allocate the 2001 married population to the year they married according to the number of marriages that occurred in each year before 2001 (by sex and age). This creates a married population for mid-2001 by year of marriage (that can therefore be presented by duration of marriage).

### Stage 3

This married population is then moved on one year at a time from 2002 to 2010 by:

- ageing the married population on by one year, each year; for example, a married person aged 16 years in 2001 would be 17 years in 2002, 18 years in 2003 and so on
- adding marriages and removing divorces for each year since 2001 according to the year they took place and the age and sex of such people
- allocating marriages ending because of death across all years of marriage according to the married population distribution (by sex and age)

This method does not account for migration or marriages abroad since 2001. The result is a married population for 2010 by sex, age and year of marriage, which is then converted to duration of marriage. Because we know the year a person married, we know how long they have been married. This married population is the denominator for the table.

## Multi-decrement life table technique

A multi-decrement life table technique is then used to analyse the proportion of marriages ending in divorce and death. This is a table for a hypothetical population living their life in 2010. Unlike a standard mortality life table, which is calculated by age, this life table uses different durations of marriage (or anniversaries, see column A in the table). There are two ways that a married individual can leave the married population: divorce or death, because the life table assumes no migration. The probabilities of either event happening, columns B and C, are calculated using 2010 divorce and mortality data as the numerator. The denominator for this calculation is the 2010 married population.

For divorce, the duration of marriage is calculated using the date of marriage and date of divorce. For death, both the person dying and the surviving partner are considered because neither individual remains in the married population (as one is deceased and the other becomes widowed). As outlined previously, an age–sex structure is calculated for each year of marriage. Age–sex specific death rates are then used to calculate death rates by each year of marriage for 2010.

Given a starting number of 100,000 marriages, column D in the table shows the number of marriages that will survive to the stated anniversary. Columns E and F show the number that will end in divorce or death before the next anniversary. This then allows the calculation in columns G and H of the cumulative percentage of marriages ended before the next anniversary, and column I, which shows the cumulative percentage of marriages surviving. Finally, column J shows the average number of years of life of marriage remaining. For example, couples celebrating their 30 year anniversary can expect to be married, on average, for a further 22 years. This assumes that divorce and mortality rates remain unchanged from 2010.

It is also important to note that civil partnerships are not included in the previous figures. Also, the results of the 2011 Census (such as the age and sex distribution of the married population) have not been incorporated into the calculations.

## 11 . Useful links and articles

Further statistics on [marriages, civil partnership formations and dissolutions](#), and [families and households](#) are available. [Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements](#) provide the estimated population by age group, sex and marital status (single, married, civil partnered, divorced and widowed) for England and Wales.

Other related articles include:

- Office for National Statistics (2017), [Marriage and divorce on the rise at 65 and over](#)
- Office for National Statistics (2013), [The number of people age 60 and over getting divorced has risen since the 1990s](#)
- Office for National Statistics (2013), [What percentage of marriages end in divorce?](#)
- Wilson B, Smallwood S (2008), [Age differences at marriage and divorce](#), Population trends 132, Summer 2008
- Wilson B, Smallwood S (2008), [The proportion of marriages ending in divorce](#), Population trends 131, Spring 2008
- Haskey, J (1999), [Divorce and remarriage in England and Wales](#), Population trends 95, Spring 1999

International publications of interest include the United Nations' [Demographic Yearbook](#) and the Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques' [Population](#), which is issued four times a year.

## 12 . Further information

Special extracts and tabulations of divorces data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) charging policy](#), where appropriate).

Enquiries should be made to Demography via email to [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk) or by telephone to +44 1329 444661. [User-requested data](#) will be made publicly available.

We welcome your feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback via email to [pop.info@ons.gov.uk](mailto:pop.info@ons.gov.uk).

## 13 . Glossary

### Annulment

An annulment of marriage occurs following a successful petition for nullity. It declares that the marriage itself is void (that no valid marriage ever existed) or voidable (was legal at time of registration but is no longer legal).

### Conditional order

For divorce applications issued by the court from 6 April 2022, a conditional order is the document that confirms that the court does not see any reason why a couple cannot divorce or separate. For divorce applications prior to 6 April 2022, a decree nisi is granted.

### Decree absolute

If the court issued a divorce application prior to 6 April 2022, granted upon a dissolution of marriage, following a petition for divorce, a decree absolute ends a valid marriage. See Dissolution. For divorce applications issued from 6 April 2022, a final order is granted.

### Decree nisi

If the court issued a divorce application prior to 6 April 2022, following the grounds for divorce being proven, the district judge grants a decree nisi as a provisional measure. Then, six weeks later, the petitioner can apply for a decree absolute. For divorce applications issued from 6 April 2022, a conditional order is granted.

### Decree of nullity

Granted upon an annulment of marriage following a petition for nullity, a decree of nullity declares that the marriage itself is void and that no valid marriage ever existed. See Annulment.

### Dissolution

A dissolution of marriage occurs following a successful petition for divorce and ends a valid marriage. Dissolution of marriage covers annulments and decree absolutes (or final orders).

### 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 of five facts (adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion and separation, either with or without consent of the respondent) to establish the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. The [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) removed the requirement to establish facts. One or both parties to a marriage may now apply to the court for a divorce order, which dissolves the marriage on the ground that the marriage has broken down irretrievably.

## Final order

For divorce applications issued by the court from 6 April 2022, a final order is the document issued by the court that ends a valid marriage. For divorce applications prior to 6 April 2022, a decree absolute is granted.

## HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS)

HMCTS is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and is responsible for the running of most of the courts and tribunals in England and Wales. HMCTS supplies information on divorces to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

## Judicial separation

This is an alternative to divorce and does not dissolve the marriage but absolves the parties from the obligation to live together. This procedure might, for example, be used if religious beliefs forbid or discourage divorce.

## Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

Following constitutional reforms, the MoJ was created on 9 May 2007. It is responsible, among other things, for the administration of the court system in England and Wales through HM Courts Service.

## Petitioner

The person seeking a dissolution or annulment.

## Respondent

The person who is served a petition for divorce.

## 14 . Cite this methodology article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 2 November 2022, ONS website, methodology article, [User guide to divorce statistics](#)

# Appendix B Form used by the courts to record a divorce decree absolute (Form 105)

## FORM 105 DECREE ABSOLUTE

<sup>8</sup>  
OPCS CODE:

OPCS NUMBER

Court Name

11

Surname of Marriage

35

Forename(s) of Spouse obtaining Decree

39

Forename(s) of other Spouse

89

Number of Matter

119

Date Petition Filed

(insert full date: DD/MM/YY)

126

Date of Decree Absolute

(insert full date: DD/MM/YY)

DD

MM

YY

131

Class(es) of Decree

(insert A,B,C,D,E or combinations as appropriate if nullity enter "N")

Husband

136

Wife

140

On Answer

144

Cross Decrees

145

Section 3 Proceedings

146

Date of Marriage

(insert full date: DD/MM/YY)

147

Age at Marriage in years

Husband

152

Wife

154

Status at Marriage

(insert B,S,D, or W as appropriate)

Husband

156

Wife

157

Date of Birth of Children under 18

(eldest first)

158

178

198

Number of Children aged 18 or over

198

Alternative or present Surname of Spouse obtaining Decree

199

Alternative Forename(s) of Spouse obtaining Decree

233

Alternative or present Surname of other Spouse

253

Alternative Forename(s) of other Spouse

277

Husband's occupation

Wife's occupation

OPCS USE (H)

OPCS USE (W)

**SPECIMEN**