

Statistical bulletin

# Divorces in England and Wales: 2022

Annual divorce and civil partnership dissolution numbers and rates, partnership type, to whom granted and duration of marriage.



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# 1 . Main points

- There were 80,057 divorces granted in England and Wales in 2022; a 29.5% decrease compared with 2021 (113,505 divorces) and the lowest number of divorces since 1971.
- In 2022, the median duration of marriages that ended in divorce (the mid-point of all durations) was 12.9 years for opposite-sex couples and 7.5 and 6.3 years for male and female same-sex couples, respectively; the longest seen in our timeseries.
- Divorce rates in 2022 were 6.7 for men and 6.6 for women per 1,000 of the male or female married population (including both opposite-sex and same-sex couples); lower than rates in 2021, with 9.5 for men and 9.4 for women per 1,000 of the married population.
- There were 525 civil partnership dissolutions (including same-sex and opposite-sex couples) in 2022; a 22.8% decrease compared with 2021 (680 dissolutions) and the lowest recorded since 2010.
- The number of divorces and dissolutions granted during 2022 may have been affected by the introduction of the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act, which came into effect on 6 April 2022; this act introduced new mandatory waiting periods at important stages, and other changes including allowing couples to end a partnership jointly, and the removal of grounds for divorce (also known as “Facts”).
- There were 7,394 divorces and 54 dissolutions (9.2% of all divorces and 10.3% of all dissolutions) granted under the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act; 28.8% of these new-law divorces, and 61.1% of new-law dissolutions, were granted under joint application.

## 2 . Number of divorces and dissolutions

This is the first year that the data include divorces and dissolutions under new legislation, which came into effect from 6 April 2022, following the [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#). Important changes include:

- applicants can apply jointly for divorce, civil partnership dissolution, or judicial separation, as well as individually
- people who are married or in civil partnerships cannot state grounds for divorce, dissolution, or separation (also known as “Facts”)
- applicants must wait a minimum of 20 weeks from the start of proceedings until applying for the conditional order

The 2022 divorce and dissolution figures include divorces and dissolutions granted under both the former and new legislation. In 2022, there were 80,057 divorces in total in England and Wales, which is a decrease of 29.5% compared with 2021 (113,505 divorces). This is the lowest number of divorces since 1971, when the divorce reform act came into effect. The number of dissolutions granted in 2022 was 525, which was a 22.8% decrease from 2021 (680 dissolutions), and the lowest number of dissolutions since 2010.

The higher number of divorces and dissolutions granted in 2021 may partially reflect delays in the number and timing of divorces granted during 2020 because of disruption in family court activity during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The lower number of divorces in 2022 may partially reflect the introduction of new minimum waiting periods, meaning that divorces applied for after 6 April 2022 may take longer to reach final order.

In 2022, there were 78,759 opposite-sex divorces, which is a decrease of 29.6% from 2021 and 23.1% from 2020 divorces. This is the lowest number seen since 1971, when there were 74,437 divorces.

Same-sex divorces also decreased, to 1,298 in 2022. This is a decrease of 17.4% compared with 1,571 same-sex divorces in 2021, which is the first year in which we have seen a decrease since the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2014. Previously, same-sex divorces increased year on year from 22 in 2015 to 1,571 in 2021.

## Final orders granted under new legislation

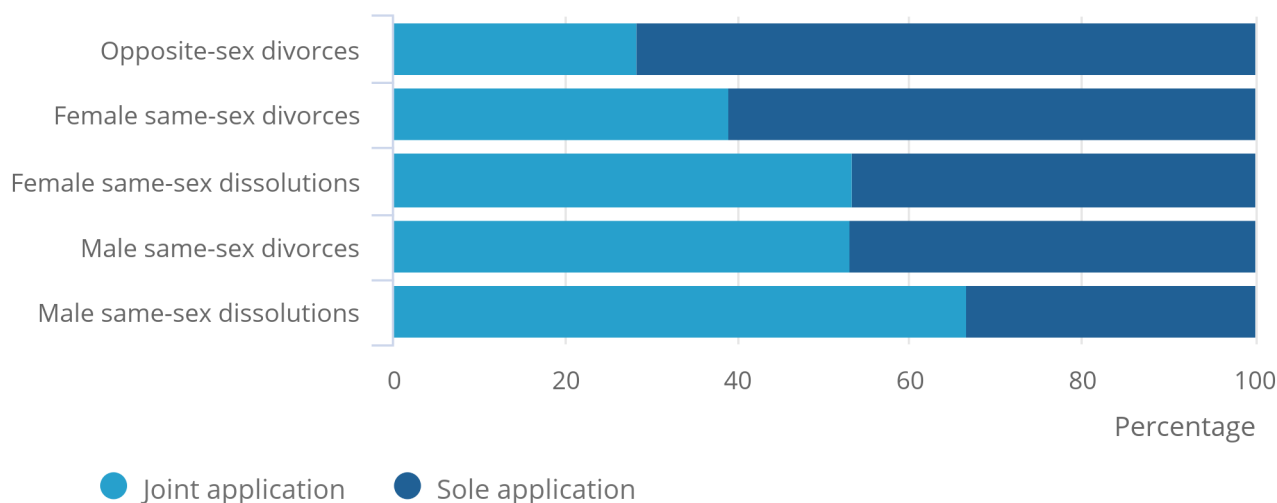
There were 7,394 divorces and 54 dissolutions granted under the new legislation that came into effect on 6 April 2022 (9.2% of all divorces and 10.3% of all dissolutions in 2022). Of these, joint applications were more prevalent among those dissolving a civil partnership than those divorcing; 28.8% of new-law divorces, and 61.1% of new-law dissolutions, were granted under joint application.

### Figure 1: There was a higher proportion of final orders granted under joint applications for civil partnership dissolutions than for divorces

Percentage of new-law divorces and dissolutions by partnership type and application type, England and Wales, 2022

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Percentage of new-law divorces and dissolutions by partnership type and application type, England and Wales, 2022



Source: Divorces in England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics, Dissolutions in England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Opposite-sex dissolutions have not been included in this chart because of the relatively small numbers of these in 2022.

Of all opposite-sex divorces in 2022, 9.1% (7,194) were completed under the new legislation. Of these, 71.7% were granted to sole applicants and 28.3% were granted to joint applicants.

A higher proportion of same-sex divorces, 15.4% (200), were granted under the new law in 2022, compared with opposite-sex divorces. Of these, 69.0% were granted to female couples. The majority (60.9%) of divorces granted to female same-sex couples under the new law were applied for by a sole applicant; with 39.1% applying jointly. Whereas 46.8% of male same-sex couples granted a divorce under the new law were applied for by a sole applicant, compared with 53.2% of male couples applying jointly.

## 3 . Divorce rates

In 2022, the divorce rate for all couples was 6.7 for men and 6.6 for women per 1,000 of the married population. These are the lowest rates since 1971, when the rates for both men and women were 5.9 per 1,000 of the married population (opposite-sex only). The 2022 rates are a decrease of 2.8 compared with 2021 rates for both men and women. This was a change from 2020 to 2021 when divorce rates had shown an increase. The timing of divorce completions had been affected by processing delays (in 2017 and 2018) and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (2020 and 2021), which may have affected the trend for the 2017 data year onwards.

### Figure 2: Divorce rates have fallen to their lowest level since 1971

Divorce rates for males and females per 1,000 of the married population aged 16 years and over, England and Wales, 1950 to 2022

#### Notes:

1. Divorce rates from 2015 include both opposite-sex and same-sex couples.
2. More information on each of the marriage and divorce acts referred to in the chart can be found in our [Divorces Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

[Download the data](#)

## 4 . Marriages ending in divorce

The cumulative percentages of marriages ending in divorce before their 25th (silver) wedding anniversary has increased over time. For couples who married in 1963 (the first cohort with data available), 23% had divorced before their 25th anniversary. This has steadily risen to 41% for couples who married in 1997 (the latest marriage cohort to potentially reach their 25th anniversary).

The percentage of marriages ending before their 10th anniversary can give an indication of divorce trends for those marrying more recently, and this has also changed over time. This has increased from 1 in 10 couples married in 1965 (10%) to 1 in 4 couples in 1995 (25%). For couples married more recently, however, there has been a decrease, with less than 1 in 5 (18%) marriages in 2012 ending in divorce before their 10th wedding anniversary (the most recent cohort to reach their 10th anniversary).

For more recent marriages (in 2012 to 2015) only 1 in 10 had ended in divorce before their 7th anniversary. This level was last seen for couples who married in 1972.

## 5 . Duration of marriage

For opposite-sex divorces in 2022, the median duration of marriage at divorce (the mid-point of all durations) was 12.9 years, an increase compared with 12.3 years in 2021. Median duration of marriage at divorce has been generally increasing over time, and the median duration of marriage at divorce recorded for 2022 is the longest on record. The lowest recorded median duration was in 1985 with 8.9 years. For those with less than 30 years of marriage, the most common duration of marriage for opposite-sex couples getting divorced in 2022 was 7 years, with 4,143 divorces.

For same-sex divorces in 2022, the median duration of marriage was 7.5 years for male same-sex couples and 6.3 years for female same-sex couples. Both male and female marriage durations at divorce are the highest seen since records began, which reflects that same-sex divorces have only been possible in England and Wales since 2015. The most common duration of marriage for male same-sex couples in 2022 was 10 to 14 years (81 divorces), and 6 years for female same-sex couples (121 divorces). It is feasible for the duration of a same-sex marriage to be longer than it has been possible to form a same-sex marriage in England and Wales. This is most likely because these couples converted a civil partnership into a marriage or formed a same-sex marriage elsewhere before they could do so in England and Wales.

## 6 . Grounds for divorce

The [Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020](#) came into effect during 2022 and included the removal of grounds for divorce (also known as Facts). Information on grounds in 2022 is therefore for a partial data year only, covering only those divorces filed under the previous legislation. The most common ground (Fact proven) for opposite-sex divorces was unreasonable behaviour; 47.1% of all opposite-sex petitions in 2022. This was the most common ground for both female applicants (52.5%), and male applicants (37.6%). Unreasonable behaviour has been the most common ground for females petitioning for divorce in opposite-sex couples for over 40 years.

Unreasonable behaviour has also been the most common ground for male applicants in opposite-sex divorces in most years since 2006. Before this, the most common grounds for male applicants were two-year separation, and adultery. However, in 2020, two-year separation was the most common ground and in 2021, both unreasonable behaviour and two-year separation each accounted for 34.8% of the grounds for males petitioning opposite-sex divorces.

For all same-sex couples in 2022, unreasonable behaviour was the ground for 53.3% of old-law divorces (52.4% for applicants of female same-sex couples and 54.7% for applicants of male same-sex couples). Unreasonable behaviour has been the most common ground for same-sex divorces since the first same-sex divorces in 2015. However, the percentage of same-sex divorce because of unreasonable behaviour has decreased with time, from 77.3% in 2015.

The proportions for the grounds given for same-sex couples are not directly comparable with opposite-sex couples; this is because same-sex marriage has only been legal since 2014 and some grounds are on the basis of two or five years of separation.

Read more in our [User guide to divorce statistics](#).

## 7 . Divorces and dissolutions in England and Wales data

### [Divorces in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 22 February 2024

Annual divorce numbers and rates, by duration of marriage, sex, to whom granted and reason.

### [Explorable dataset for divorces in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 2 November 2022

This dataset provides statistics on divorces between opposite-sex couples, which took place in England and Wales, broken down by the year of occurrence, Fact proven, who petitioned and duration of marriage.

### [Civil partnership dissolutions](#)

Dataset | Released 22 February 2024

This dataset provides statistics on civil partnership dissolutions which took place in England and Wales analysed by sex and quarter of occurrence.

## 8 . Glossary

### **Annulment**

An annulment of marriage or civil partnership occurs following a successful petition for nullity. It declares that the marriage or civil partnership itself is void (that no valid marriage or civil partnership ever existed) or voidable (was legal at time of registration but is no longer legal). Previously referred to as “decree of nullity” and now known as “nullity order”.

### **Applicant**

The person or persons seeking a divorce, dissolution or annulment. Previously referred to as a petitioner.

### **Facts proven**

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

### **HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS)**

The [HM Courts and Tribunals Service \(HMCTS\)](#) 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 and dissolutions to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

### **Median**

The median duration of marriage at divorce reported in this release is represented by the middle value when the data are arranged in increasing order. The median is used, rather than the mean, because the duration of marriage for divorces is not symmetrically distributed. Therefore, the median provides a more accurate reflection of the average duration of marriage.

### **Petitioner**

The person seeking a dissolution or annulment prior to 6 April 2022. Now known as an applicant.

## Respondent

The person who is served an application for divorce or dissolution.

Our [User guide to divorce statistics](#) contains a more detailed glossary.

## 9 . Measuring the data

This release provides final annual divorce and dissolution statistics for England and Wales for 2022.

Divorce and dissolution statistics are derived from information recorded by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) during the divorce and dissolution process and include annulments for old-law cases. Annulments are for marriages and civil partnerships that were void or not legally valid in the first place, as explained in the GOV. UK article, [Annul a marriage](#). Divorce and dissolution statistics do not include couples who separate but do not divorce or dissolve their civil partnership.

Divorces and dissolutions for legal partnerships that took place abroad are included, provided the legal partnership was legally recognised in the UK and one of the parties had a permanent home in England and/or Wales.

### Quality and methodology

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created, is available in our [Divorces Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

Our [User guide to divorce statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to divorces and includes a glossary of terms. The user guide will be updated to reflect the latest changes in due course.

Our [Civil partnerships in England and Wales QMI](#) provides more information on quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created. This QMI will be updated to reflect the latest changes on 29 February 2024.

Our [Revisions policy for population and international migration statistics \(including divorce statistics\)](#) is available.

## 10 . Strengths and limitations

Divorce and dissolution statistics are compiled to enable the analysis of social and demographic trends. They are also used for developing and monitoring government policy as well as by religious and other belief organisations to monitor trends and plan their services.

### Comparability

Divorce statistics are broadly comparable between countries within the UK; more information on comparability is contained in our [Divorces Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

More dissolutions quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Civil partnerships in England and Wales QMI](#).

Divorce and dissolution statistics tell us the number of divorces and dissolutions that take place during a particular year. They are not directly comparable with estimates from the census or from household surveys on the overall number of divorcees or people who have dissolved a civil partnership in the population.

### Accuracy

From the 2020 data year onwards, information about age and previous partnership status is not available as it is no longer collected during the divorce and civil partnership dissolution process by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS).

## Calculation of rates

Divorce rates have been calculated using the total married population (both opposite-sex and same-sex couples) and dissolution rates have been calculated using the total civil partnered population (both opposite-sex and same-sex couples) from our [Population estimates by marital status bulletin](#).

While the actual number of males and females in opposite-sex couples getting divorced or dissolving civil partnerships in a particular year is equal, the number of married or civil partnered males and females can differ. This is because one partner could live away, either overseas or in a communal establishment, such as a care home or prison. For this reason, divorce and dissolution rates for males and females in opposite-sex couples may be different for a particular year.

Rates for 2012 to 2021 have been recalculated using the rebased population estimates so rates will differ to those previously published. The last time 2021 rates were calculated, 2020 mid-year estimates were used as figures for 2021 were not available. The rate for 2021 has now been calculated using rebased 2021 mid-year estimates.

## 11 . Related links

### [Divorce statistics for Scotland](#)

Publication | Released 25 April 2023

Statistics on civil-law cases in the Scottish courts together with other related information, such as statistics from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey.

### [Divorce statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

Webpage | Released 26 October 2023

Divorce statistics for Northern Ireland based on decree absolute data provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

### [Marriage and divorce on the rise at 65 and over](#)

Article | Released 18 July 2017

This article discusses the pattern of changing relationships at older ages in England and Wales and why older people are getting married and divorced in greater numbers.

### [Divorce statistics for Europe](#)

Article | Released 7 August 2023

This article presents developments that have taken place in relation to family formation and dissolution through an analysis of marriage and divorce indicators for the EU-27 countries.

## 12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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