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**Coverage**

England and Wales

**Theme**

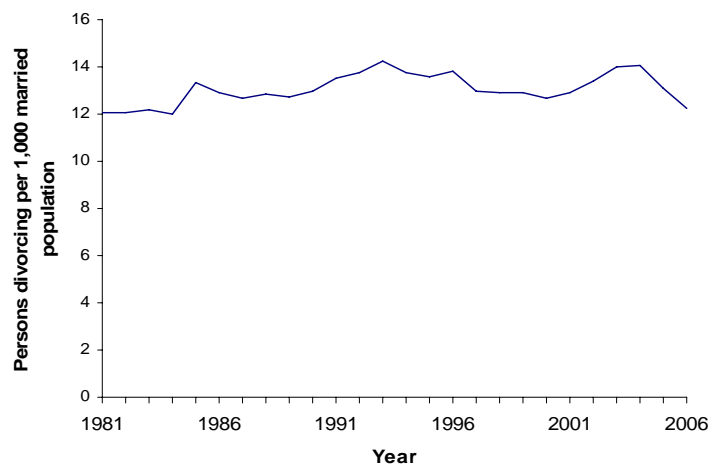
Population and Migration

## Divorce rate lowest for 22 years

The provisional divorce rate in England and Wales fell for a second consecutive year, reaching its lowest level since 1984, according to new statistics on divorce in 2006 released today by the Office for National Statistics.

The divorce rate fell to 12.2 divorces per thousand married men and women, a drop of 7 per cent compared with the 2005 figure of 13.1.

Divorce rate in England and Wales, 1981-2006



Compared with 2005, divorce rates in England and Wales for both men and women fell across all age groups, apart from men aged 60 and over, where there was a small increase.

For the fifth consecutive year both men and women in their late twenties had the highest divorce rates of all five-year age groups. In 2006, there were 26.0 divorces per 1,000 married men aged 25-29 and 27.3 divorces per 1,000 married women aged 25-29.

The number of divorces in England and Wales fell for the third year in succession to 132,562 in 2006, a drop of 6.5 per cent compared with 141,750 in 2005. This is the lowest number since 1977 when there were 129,053 divorces.

Issued by  
National Statistics  
1 Drummond Gate  
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone  
Press Office 020 7533 5702  
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Statistician  
Louise Mackarness 01329 813772  
Email [louise.mackarness@ons.gov.uk](mailto:louise.mackarness@ons.gov.uk)

Internet  
[www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)



The average (mean) age at divorce increased for both men and women in 2006 by a similar amount. For women it increased from 40.6 years in 2005 to 40.9 in 2006, for men the increase was from 43.1 years in 2005 to 43.4 in 2006.

The average (median) duration of marriage for divorces granted in 2006 stayed at the 2005 level of 11.6 years.

One in five men and women divorcing in 2006 had a previous marriage ending in divorce. This proportion has doubled in 25 years: in 1981 just over one in ten men and women divorcing had a previous marriage ending in divorce.

In 2006, 69 per cent of divorces were granted to wives and in 54 per cent of these cases the husband's behaviour was the fact proven. Of 32 per cent of divorces granted to the husband the fact proven was the wife's behaviour.

Over half (53 per cent) of couples divorcing in 2006 had at least one child aged under 16, the same as in 2005. There were 125,030 children aged under 16 who were in families where the parents divorced in 2006. 20 per cent of these children were under five and 63 per cent were under eleven. These are the same percentages as in 2005.

The provisional number of divorces in the United Kingdom fell by 4.5 per cent in 2006 from 155,052 in 2005 to 148,141 in 2006.

However the number of divorces in Scotland rose by nearly 20 per cent from 10,940 in 2005 to 13,014 in 2006. This may be due to an amendment to the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 (see background note 8).

The number of divorces in Northern Ireland also increased. In 2006, there were 2,565 divorces, 8.6 per cent more than in 2005 when there were 2,362.

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. More data on divorces in England and Wales in 2006 are available on the National Statistics website:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14124>
2. More information on divorces in the UK (including data for Scotland and Northern Ireland) is available on the National Statistics website:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=170>
3. A marriage may be either **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. In this release the term divorce includes both decrees absolute and decrees of nullity.
4. All rates for 2006 are provisional as they were produced using the 2005 mid-year marital status estimates. These estimates are the latest available and were published on 30 November 2006. The 2006 marital status estimates will be available in November 2007.
5. The average (mean) ages presented in this news release have not been standardised for age and therefore do not take account of the changing age structure of the population.
6. The average duration of marriage at divorce in this news release is represented by the median. The median is the middle value when the data are arranged in increasing order.
7. Children of the family are those as defined by the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 (Section 52). As well as children born to the divorcing couple, this includes children born outside marriage, children of previous marriages, and adopted children, provided that they were treated by both partners as children of the family. The analysis of children's age takes place at time of petition, not at divorce.
8. The Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 came into effect on 4 May 2006. The Act reduced the separation periods for divorce with consent to one year (previously two years) and without consent to two years (previously five years). It also removed 'desertion' as a ground for divorce.
9. Further summary statistics on divorces in England and Wales in 2006 will be published in *Population Trends* 129 on 27 September 2007. Full details of divorces in 2006 are expected to be published in 2008.
10. Full details of divorces in 2005 are due to be published in the annual reference volume *Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics 2005* (Series FM2 no. 33). Publication is planned for spring 2008.



11. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
12. **National Statistics** are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2007.