

# Marriages

In 2015:

- 8,355 marriages were registered, equivalent to roughly 1 every hour.
- While August was the most popular month to get married, Saturday 5th September was the most popular day.
- The average age for grooms was 34.3 years, with brides slightly younger with an average age of 32.2.
- St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, Derry was the most popular religious venue for religious marriages. The Belfast Registration Office was the most popular venue for civil marriage ceremonies.
- 15 per cent of all religious marriage ceremonies were held outside of religious buildings.

## MARRIAGES

# 8,355





**AVERAGE of  
1  
MARRIAGE  
PER HOUR**

MOST POPULAR MONTH  
of MARRIAGE

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

**MOST  
POPULAR  
DATE**

SEPTEMBER

5



**AVERAGE AGE at MARRIAGE**

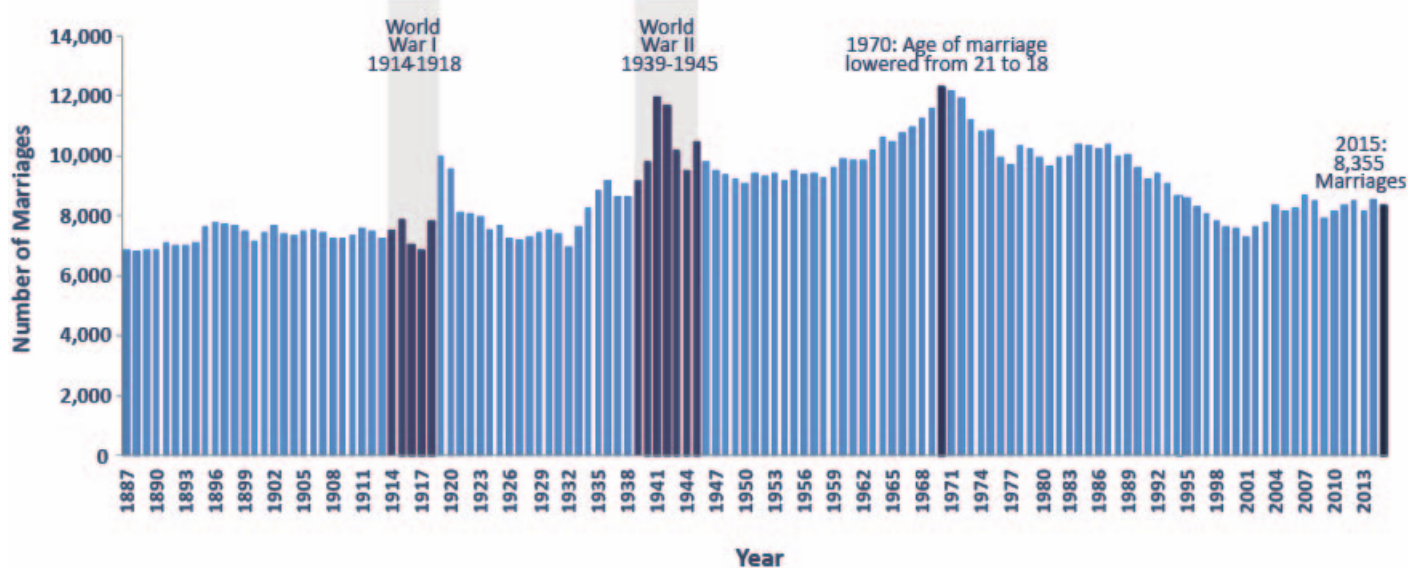


**15% OF RELIGIOUS  
MARRIAGES HELD  
OUTSIDE OF RELIGIOUS  
BUILDINGS**

## An average of one marriage was conducted every hour

There were 8,355 marriages celebrated in 2015, an average of 1 marriage per hour. This is a decrease of 2.3 per cent on the 2014 figure of 8,550, while reflecting a 15 per cent increase on the 30 year low of 7,281 marriages that were registered in 2001. The number of marriages in Northern Ireland peaked in 1970, coinciding with the lowering of the minimum age of marriage from 21 to 18. Historically, other peaks are noticeable after the First World War and during the Second World War.

Figure 1.40: Marriages in Northern Ireland, 1887 - 2015



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### Marriage Rate

Indicative marriage rates can be calculated by expressing the number of people who married per 1,000 population aged 16 and over. In 2015, 16,710 people were married, equivalent to an indicative marriage rate of 11.4 persons per 1,000 population aged 16 and over. This represents a slight decrease on the corresponding figure of 11.7 in 2014.

The marriage rate for males was slightly higher than that of females (i.e. 11.7 per 1,000 men aged 16 and over and 11.1 per 1,000 women aged 16 and over). Each of these rates represents a decrease on the corresponding rates for males and females in 2014, namely 12.1 and 11.4 respectively.

The marriage rates for both males and females remain lower than those of 30 years ago (18.9 for men and 17.4 for women), indicating an increased tendency to cohabit rather than marry. Over half (54 per cent) of couples who married in 2015 reported living at the same address prior to getting married.

## Age at Marriage

Over the course of the last 30 years the average age at which both men and women have been getting married has been increasing. Since 1985, the average age of grooms has increased by 7.3 years (from 27.0 years to 34.3 years in 2015) and the average age of brides has increased by 7.2 years (from 25.0 years to 32.2 years).

Approximately one in nine brides (11 per cent) and one in seventeen grooms (5.9 per cent) were under 25 years of age when they married in 2015. By way of contrast, the comparable proportions a decade ago were 21 per cent and 11 per cent respectively.

Approximately 11 per cent of brides and 6 per cent of grooms were <25 years old when they were married

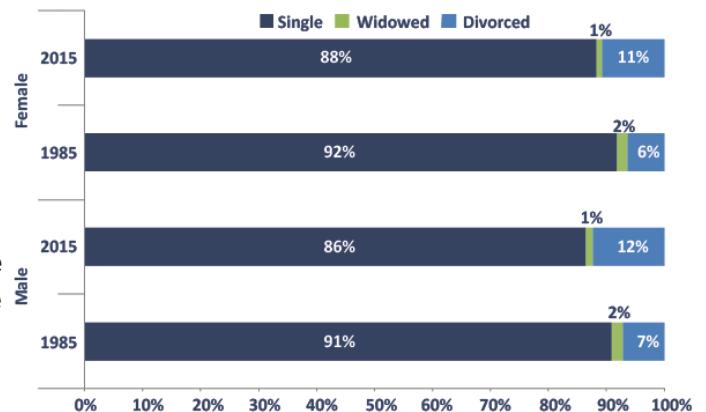
## Marital Status at Marriage

Over four fifths (82 per cent) of all marriages were the first for both partners. Remarriages for both parties accounted for a further 7.1 per cent of all marriages, with the remaining 11 per cent involving couples where only one partner had been married previously.

The percentage of people marrying who were divorcees rose from 6.7 per cent in 1985 to 12 per cent in 2005 and has remained around this level over the last decade. This coincides with a decrease in the proportion of people marrying who were single before marriage. The proportion of those marrying who were widowed has decreased over the past 30 years from around 2 per cent to 1 per cent for both brides and grooms.

Just over half of the couples who married in 2015 lived at the same address prior to getting married.

**Figure 1.41: Marital Status of those who got Married by Sex (1985 and 2015)**



[Download Chart](#) (XLS Format – 31Kb)

## Country of Birth and Residency

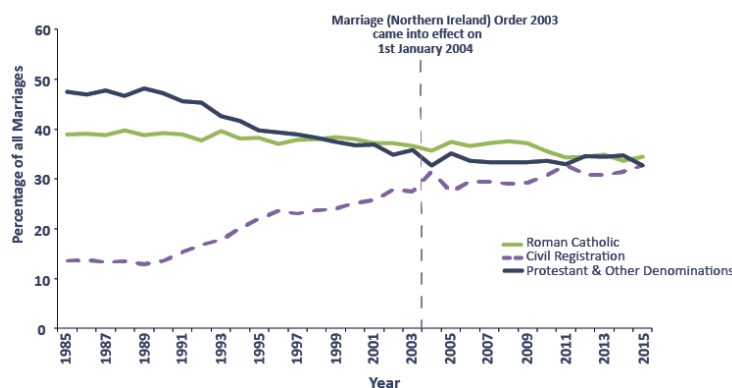
The majority of marriages continue to be of couples where at least one partner lives in Northern Ireland (88 per cent). For those couples not currently resident in Northern Ireland, but choosing to get married here, 69 per cent were of couples where one or both partners were born here, indicating a tendency to return home to Northern Ireland to get married.

In 71 per cent of all marriages registered during 2015, both partners were born in Northern Ireland, whereas in 22 per cent, only one partner was born in Northern Ireland. In the remaining 7.2 per cent of marriages neither partner was born in Northern Ireland.

## Religious and Civil Marriages

Of the 5,619 religious marriages registered in 2015, more than half (51 per cent) were Roman Catholic ceremonies, 18 per cent Presbyterian, 12 per cent Church of Ireland, 4.4 per cent Methodist and 14 per cent other denominations.

**Figure 1.42: Percentage of marriages by method of celebration (1985 to 2015)**



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While the proportion of marriages that were Roman Catholic ceremonies has remained relatively stable over time, the proportion of other religious ceremonies has generally been decreasing since the early nineties. This coincides with an increase in popularity of Civil Ceremonies in part due to the introduction of the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 which enabled civil ceremonies to be conducted in approved venues as well as District Registration Offices. In 2015, 33 per cent of all marriages (2,736) were celebrated by a civil ceremony, a marked increase on 30 years ago (14 per cent in 1985). The highest civil ceremony rates on record were recorded in 2011 and 2015.

## Place of Ceremony

District Registration Offices and religious buildings continue to be the most popular venues for weddings. In 2015, the District Registration Office in Belfast had the most civil marriage ceremonies (500) of all the District Registration Offices. In terms of religious buildings, St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn, Derry hosted the most weddings (53).

Marriage legislation underwent major change in 2004. Under the new law there are less strict residence requirements for marriage; these allow civil marriage ceremonies to be conducted outside District Registration Offices in approved venues. Since then the percentage of all marriages taking place in approved venues has increased steadily from 12 per cent in 2005 to 26 per cent in 2015. The number of approved venues has also expanded with 203 unique locations chosen by couples to have their ceremony in 2015. Of all civil marriage ceremonies in 2015, some 49 per cent were held in approved venues other than a District Registration Office.

The most popular locations outside of District Registration Offices and Religious Buildings were Galgorm Manor Hotel, Ballymena (153 marriages) followed by Belfast Loughshore Hotel, Carrickfergus (110 marriages), Clondeboye Lodge Hotel, Bangor (107 marriages), and The Old Inn, Crawfordsburn (92 marriages).

The prevalence of conducting religious marriage ceremonies in venues other than religious buildings varies by religion and denomination. In 2015, 15 per cent of all religious marriage ceremonies were held outside of religious buildings.

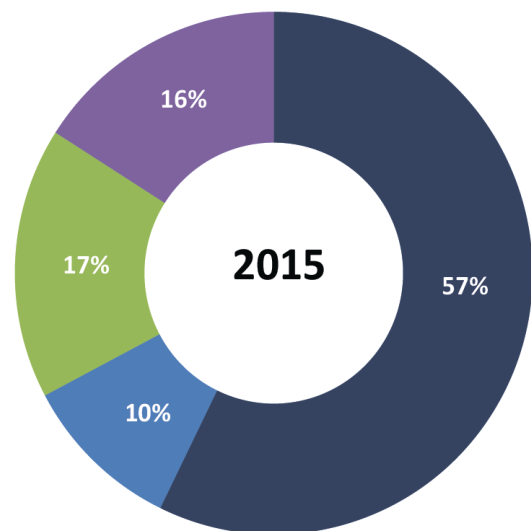
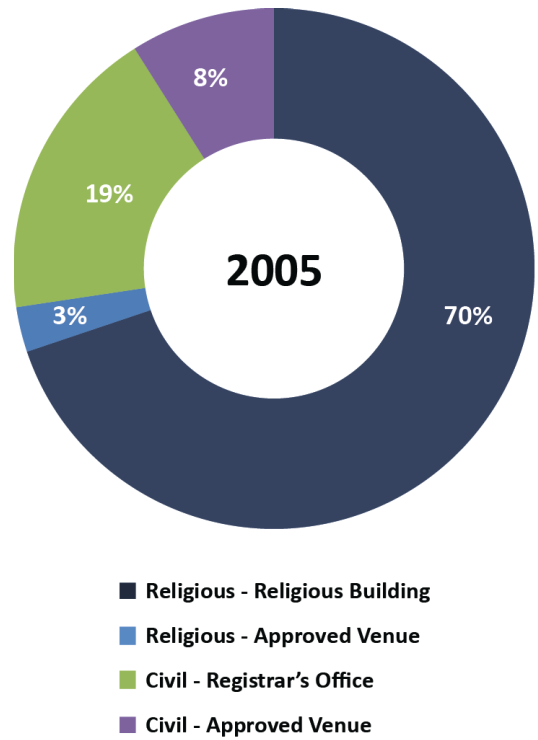
### Seasonality & Day of Marriage

The summer months (May to September) were the most popular choice of couples for their big day, with August being the most common month to get married (1,279 couples) followed by July (1,122 couples). The least popular month to ‘tie the knot’ was January with 211 marriages. The most popular week to get married was from Sunday 2nd August to Saturday 8th August when 314 couples got married.

The time of year isn’t the only decision to be made by couples planning a wedding; the day of the week is also important. The most common day of the week for all marriages in 2015, was a Saturday (37 per cent) while Friday was the most common day for civil marriages (31 per cent). Saturday 5th September was the most popular day in 2015 to get married, with 109 couples marrying on this day. Saturday 1st August 2015 followed a close second, with 101 weddings on this day.

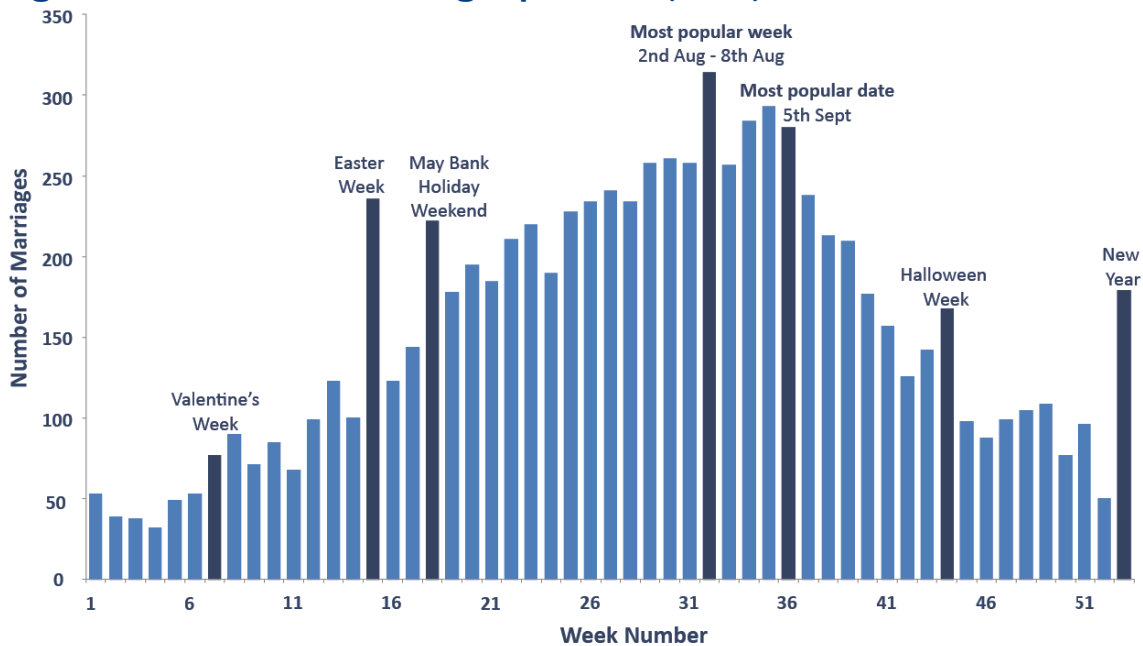
With high demand for Friday and Saturday weddings coupled with significantly higher costs for weddings on these days, Sunday is becoming a more popular day to get married. For example, 154 marriages took place on a Sunday in 2015, which is almost 10 times the number recorded a decade previously (16 in 2005).

**Figure 1.43: Percentage of marriages by place of ceremony (2005 and 2015)**



[Download Chart](#) (XLS Format – 33Kb)

Figure 1.44: Number of marriages per week (2015)



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**Belfast LGD hosted the most marriages – 1,410**

**44 per cent of marriages in Belfast LGD took the form of a civil ceremony**

### Marriages by Area

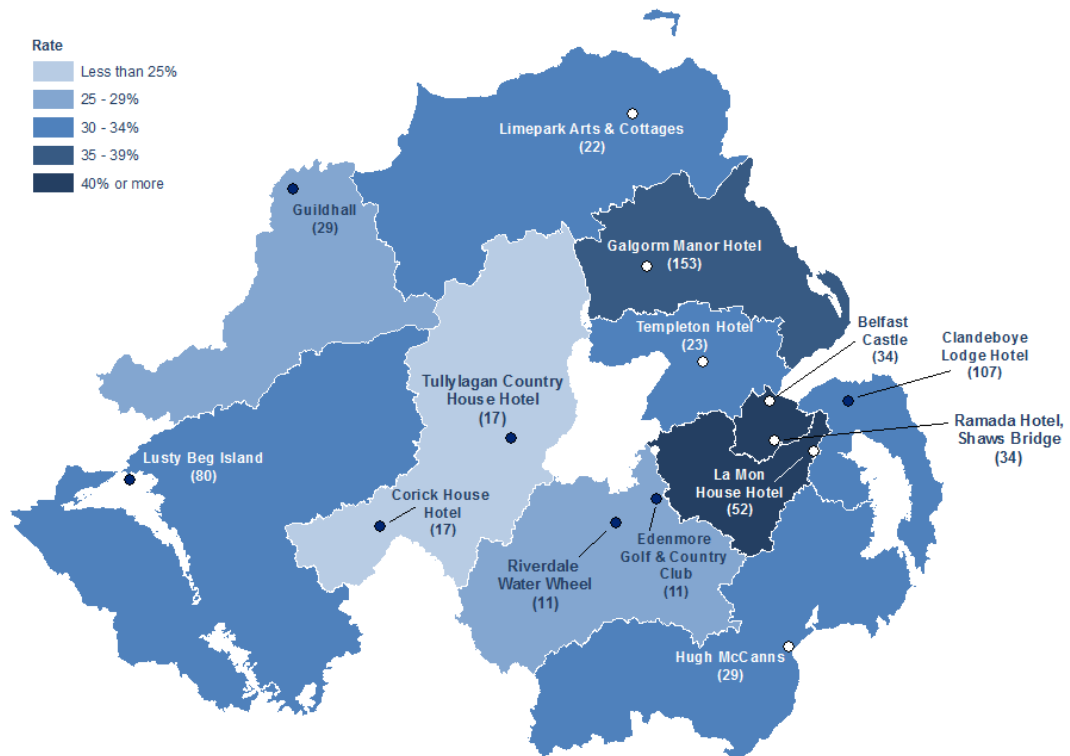
Belfast Local Government District hosted the most marriages in 2015 (1,410), followed by Newry, Mourne & Down (1,025) and Mid & East Antrim (794). Antrim & Newtownabbey had the fewest marriages (379) in 2015.

The characteristics of marriages varied across Local Government Districts. For example, the proportion of couples who were living together before getting married ranged from a low of 36 per cent in Ards & North Down to a high of 63 per cent in Mid Ulster. In addition, the proportion of marriages that took the form of a civil ceremony and were conducted by a District Registrar ranged from 18 per cent in Mid Ulster to 44 per cent in Belfast.

The average age of males and females at the time of marriage varied across Local Government Districts. For example, couples in Mid Ulster tended to get married younger than their counterparts in Ards & North Down, who (on average) were approximately 3 years older when they ‘tied the knot’.

Four in five religious ceremonies in Derry City & Strabane Local Government District were Roman Catholic compared with just over one in ten of religious ceremonies in Ards & North Down, reflecting the religious composition of the populations in these Local Government Districts.

**Figure 1.45: Civil Ceremonies as a Proportion of all Marriages, by Local Government District (2015)**

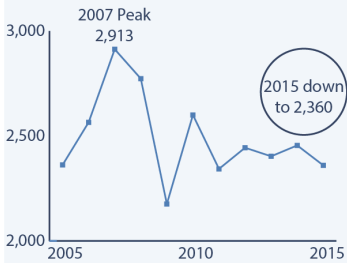


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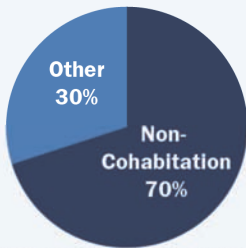
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# DIVORCES

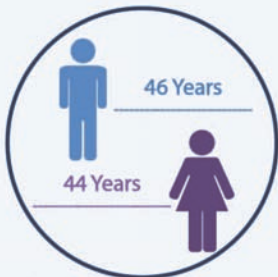
## 2,360

### GROUNDS for DIVORCE



### AVERAGE LENGTH of MARRIAGE at Divorce



### AVERAGE AGE at DIVORCE

**CHILDREN AFFECTED by DIVORCE**

**4,200** children/stepchildren affected

*of which*

**1,800** under 16

# Divorces

In 2015:

- 2,360 divorces were granted. This is fewer than in the previous year (2,455) and 19 per cent lower than the peak number of 2,913 in 2007.
- Non-cohabitation remains the most frequently recorded reason for divorce accounting for 70 per cent of all divorces.
- Those marriages which ended in divorce had lasted an average of 17 years. The average ages of the men and women concerned were 46.9 and 44.9 years respectively.
- Just over 4,200 children/stepchildren were affected by the divorces that were granted, of which almost 1,800 were under the age of 16.



The number of divorces granted was slightly lower than in the previous year (2,360 compared with 2,455), and 19 per cent lower than the peak number of 2,913 divorces in 2007.

During the late 1970's the number of divorces was around 600 per year and by the late 1980's this figure had tripled to around 1,800 per year. Since the 1990's there has been another increase in the number of divorces, peaking at the onset of the recession in 2007 and 2008 when 2,913 and 2,773 were recorded respectively. In more recent years this number has declined, fluctuating around 2,400 per year.

The divorce figures reported here are based on Decree Absolutes. Decree Nisi information can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. A Decree Nisi does not terminate the marriage; a couple remain married until the Decree Absolute has been granted. In some cases, following the receipt of a Decree Nisi, the parties may not apply for the Decree Absolute for a number of years. An example of this would be when one or more parties attempt to remarry and realise that the Decree Absolute is needed. For this reason among others, the period between the divorce being filed for or 'petitioned' and the year it becomes final can be lengthy.

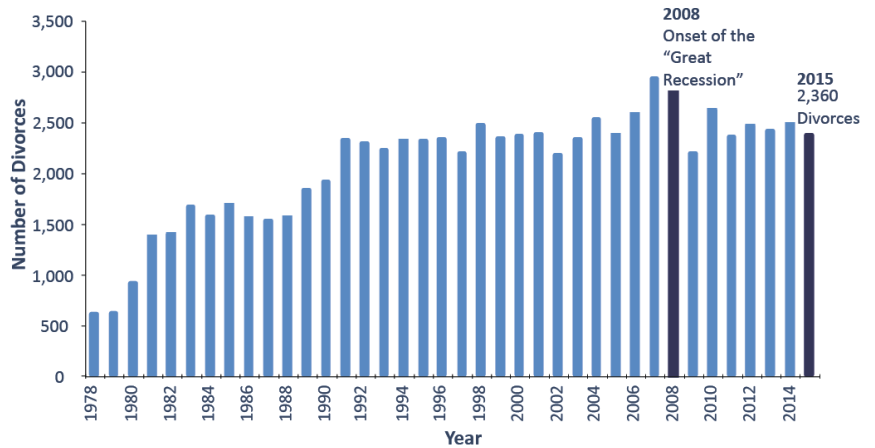
Of the 2,360 divorces granted in 2015, approximately 83 per cent were granted within 3 years of the petition being lodged. Within 5 years, 94 per cent were granted. In 1 per cent of cases, the Decree Absolute was granted more than 10 years after the petition was lodged.

### Grounds for Divorce

Non-cohabitation remains the most frequently recorded reason for divorce with 1,657 cases last year, followed by behaviour (376) and combined grounds (276).

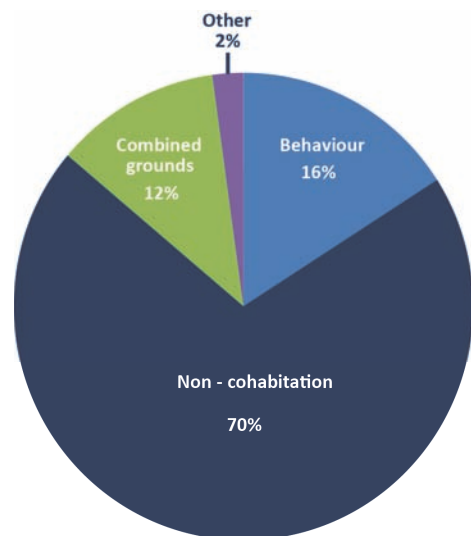
As in previous years, women were more likely than men to lodge an application for divorce. For example, 1,421 divorces were lodged by women and 901 were lodged by men, with a further 38 resulting from joint applications.

**Figure 1.46: Number of divorces granted (1978 to 2015)**



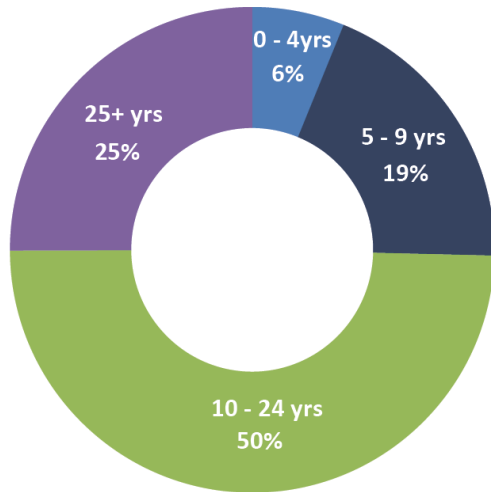
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**Figure 1.47: Reasons for Divorce (2015)**



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**Figure 1.48: Duration of Marriage at Time of Divorce (2015)**



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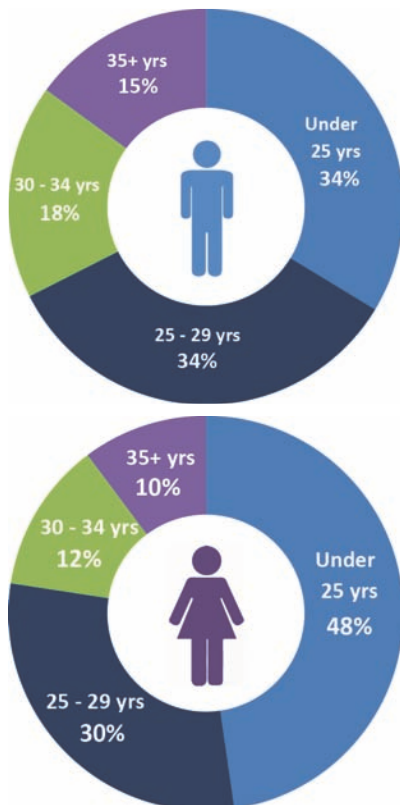
### Duration of Marriage

The average duration of marriage ending in divorce was 17 years; that is, the number of years between the couple’s marriage and their Decree Absolute being granted. If we compare that to the year in which the divorce was filed for, as opposed to finalised, the average duration of marriage before divorce proceedings commenced was 16 years.

Compared to 30 years ago, while more divorces are now being granted (2,360 in 2015 compared with 1,669 in 1985), the marriages now ending in divorce tend to be lasting longer (17 years in 2015 compared to 14 years in 1985).

Of the divorcing couples, 6 per cent were married less than 5 years and 19 per cent between 5 and 9 years. Those married 25 years or more accounted for one quarter of all divorces (25 per cent).

**Figure 1.49: Age at Marriage of Divorcees (2015)**



[Download Chart](#) (XLS Format – 30Kb)

### Marital Status of Divorcees at the Time of their Marriage

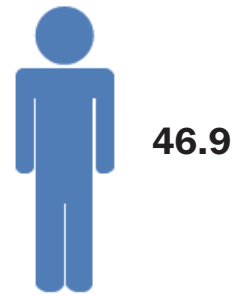
While the majority of divorcees had been single at the time of marriage (88 per cent of males and 90 per cent of females), the proportion of people getting divorced who had been previously divorced continues to account for approximately 10 per cent of both male and female divorcees. Approximately 1 per cent of all divorcees in 2015 were widows or widowers when they re-married.

### Age of Divorcees at the Time of Marriage

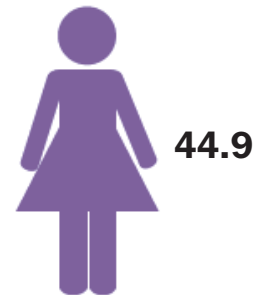
The average ages of the men and women who got divorced were 28.6 years and 26.6 years respectively at the time of their wedding. Some 34 per cent of the males concerned and 48 per cent of the females concerned were aged under 25 years at the time of getting married. In contrast, 15 per cent of male divorcees and 10 per cent of female divorcees were aged 35 or over when they got married, suggesting that those who marry later in life are less likely to get divorced.

### Age at Divorce

Almost two fifths of those who were granted a divorce in 2015 were in their forties (39 per cent). On average, men were typically 2 years older than women (46.9 years compared with 44.9 years).



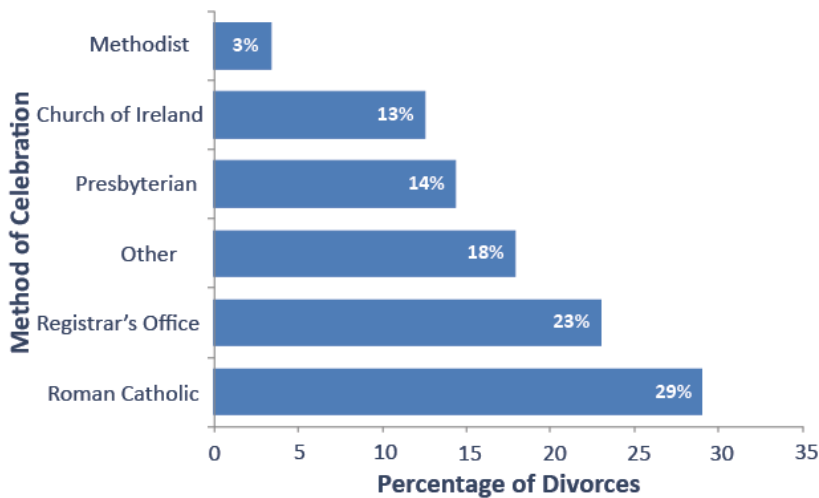
**AVERAGE AGE  
AT  
DIVORCE**



### Method of Celebration of Marriage for Divorces

Last year, 29 per cent of divorces were of marriages that had been celebrated in a Roman Catholic Church. A further 30 per cent were of marriages celebrated in a Presbyterian Church (including Free Presbyterian), Church of Ireland or Methodist Church. Those that had been celebrated in a District Registration Office represented 23 per cent.

**Figure 1.50: Divorces by Method of Celebration of Marriage (2015)**



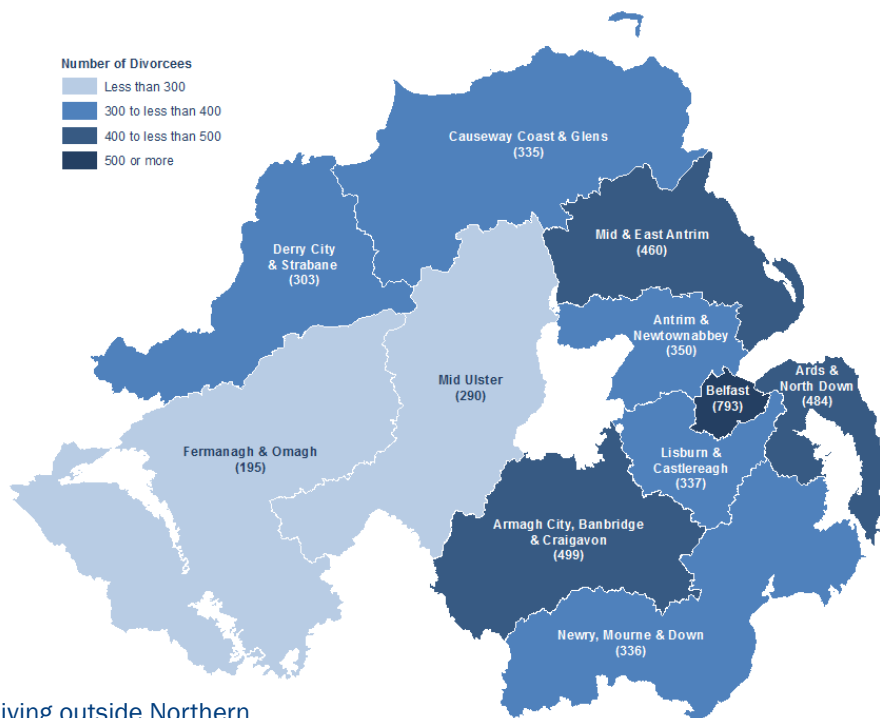
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Some 17 per cent of divorces in Northern Ireland were associated with a marriage which took place outside Northern Ireland. Of these divorces, a significant proportion (25 per cent) involved at least one partner living outside Northern Ireland at the time of their divorce.

### Divorcees by Area of Residence

Area of residence of divorcees varies throughout Northern Ireland. In 2015, Belfast had the highest percentage (18 per cent) of divorcees followed by Ards & North Down and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon, both with 11 per cent each. Some 7.2 per cent of divorcees were residing outside Northern Ireland at the time of divorce, with more than twice as many being men than women.

**Figure 1.51: Number of Divorcees by Local Government District (2015)**



Note: 338 divorcees living outside Northern Ireland (or of unknown origin) are not included in the map.

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### Children Affected by Divorce

Just over 4,200 children/stepchildren were affected by the divorces finalised in Northern Ireland during 2015, almost 1,800 of whom were under the age of 16. Approximately a further 400 children were aged 16 or 17, whilst the remainder were aged 18 or over when the decree absolute was granted.