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IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



PREFACE

This statistical release presents information on civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions that were registered in 2023 in the South African national marriage registration system maintained by the national Department of Home Affairs (DHA). It highlights trends in the number of marriages and unions as well as demographic and other dynamics amongst married partners. The release also reports on divorces that were granted in 2023 by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ&CD) and Office of the Chief Justice (OCJ). It focuses on trends in divorces, demographic and occupational characteristics of the plaintiffs, age at the time of divorce, duration of marriage at the time of divorce and divorces involving couples with children less than 18 years. The information on marriages and divorces is important for understanding the formation and dissolution of marriage relationships and its implications on the household structure and composition.



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1. Introduction

There are three main sources of marriage and divorce statistics in South Africa; namely, those compiled from population censuses; household-based sample surveys and administrative data (i.e. those compiled from civil registration systems and administrative records). The data from these sources provides information on different aspects of marriages and divorces in the country. Census and survey data are by nature subjective because they are based on self-reporting and provide cross-sectional data on individuals' marital status (never married, married, divorced, widowed, etc.). Marriages and divorces in this report cover different types of marriages and associated divorces that took place at different periods in people's lives but registered/granted in 2023. The mid-year population estimates are used to calculate crude rates in the report.

Unlike in census and survey data, registered marriages and divorces data are based on the continuous recording of these events as they take place. Not all marriages are registered in South Africa, as some are not recognised by the law of the country. The three types of marriages that are recognised by the law include civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions; however Muslim marriages are recognised as part of customary marriages. This data should be part of the analysis in the near future. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) is responsible for managing registered marriages and unions under the following legislations:

- Civil marriages are administered through the Marriage Act, 1961 (Act No. 25 of 1961) as amended, and its associated regulations.
- Customary marriages are governed by the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, 1998 (Act No. 120 of 1998) which came into effect on 15 November 2000.
- The Civil Union Act, 2006 (Act No. 17 of 2006) which came into operation on 30 November 2006, governs civil unions (relationships between same-sex couples that are legally recognised by state authorities). The act accommodates persons who cannot or wish not to enter into a marriage under the Marriage Act, 1961.

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) publishes data on marriages for South African citizens and permanent residents that are collected through the civil registration systems of the DHA. Before 2008, the data in the annual release of *Marriages and divorces* (statistical release P0307) covered only civil marriages. However in 2008, Stats SA started publishing available data on customary marriages and civil unions. The registration of customary marriages and civil unions began in 2003 and 2007, respectively.

The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ&CD) and Office of the Chief Justice (OCJ) are responsible for handling matters relating to the dissolution of registered marriages (civil and customary) and civil unions. This responsibility of the department is mandated through:

- The Divorce Act, 1979 (Act No.70 of 1979), as amended; and
- The Jurisdiction of Regional Courts Amendment Act, 2008 (Act No. 31 of 2008), which came into effect on 9 August 2010.

Data on divorces is obtained from various regional and high courts that deal with divorce matters. The data are based on successful divorce cases that have been issued with a decree of divorce. Divorce cases came from marriages that were registered in different years as well as divorce cases that were filed in different years but whose divorce decrees were granted in 2023. It should be noted that although both the data on the marriages and divorces are collected the same year, the data sets are not linked to each other.

2. Marriages

2.1 Civil marriages

2.1.1 Trends in the registration of civil marriages (2014–2023)

Information provided on Figure 1 below, shows that 99 289 civil marriages of South African citizens and permanent residents were registered at the DHA in 2023. The figure further shows that the number of registered marriages consistently declined in the 10-year period (2014 to 2023) except for a slight increase of 0,6% between 2015 and 2016 and an increase of 5,0% between 2021 and 2022. During the period between 2014 and 2023, the highest number of marriages was recorded in 2014 (150 852) and the lowest number was recorded in 2020 (89 338).

Figure 1 – Number of registered civil marriages in South Africa, 2014–2023

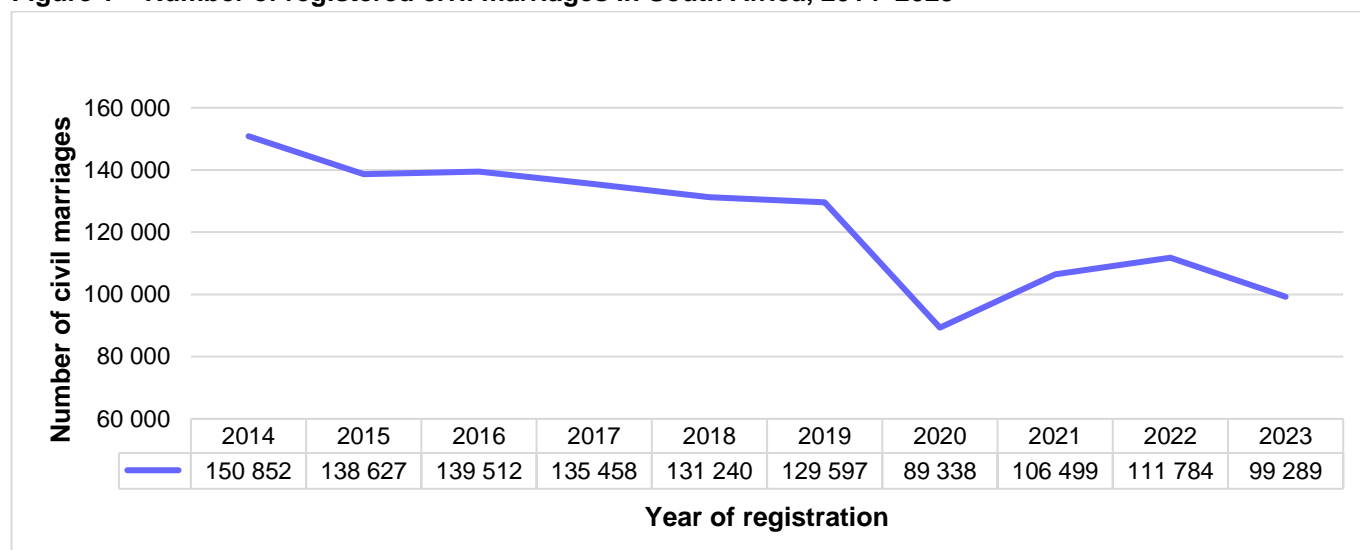
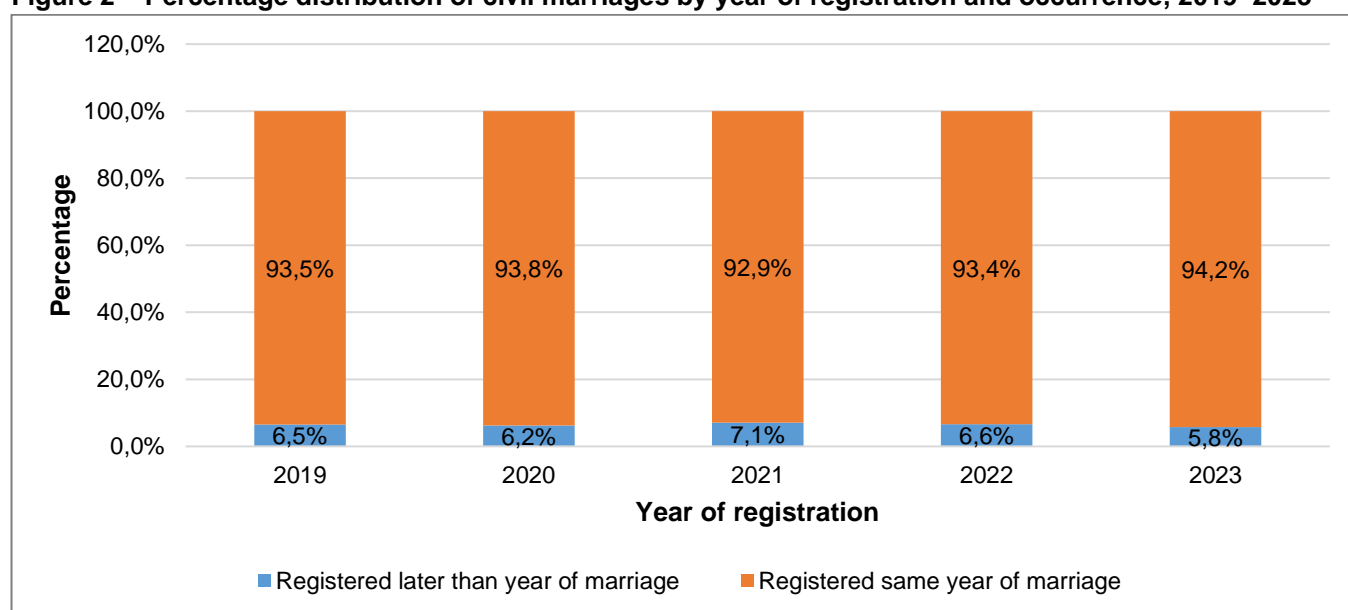


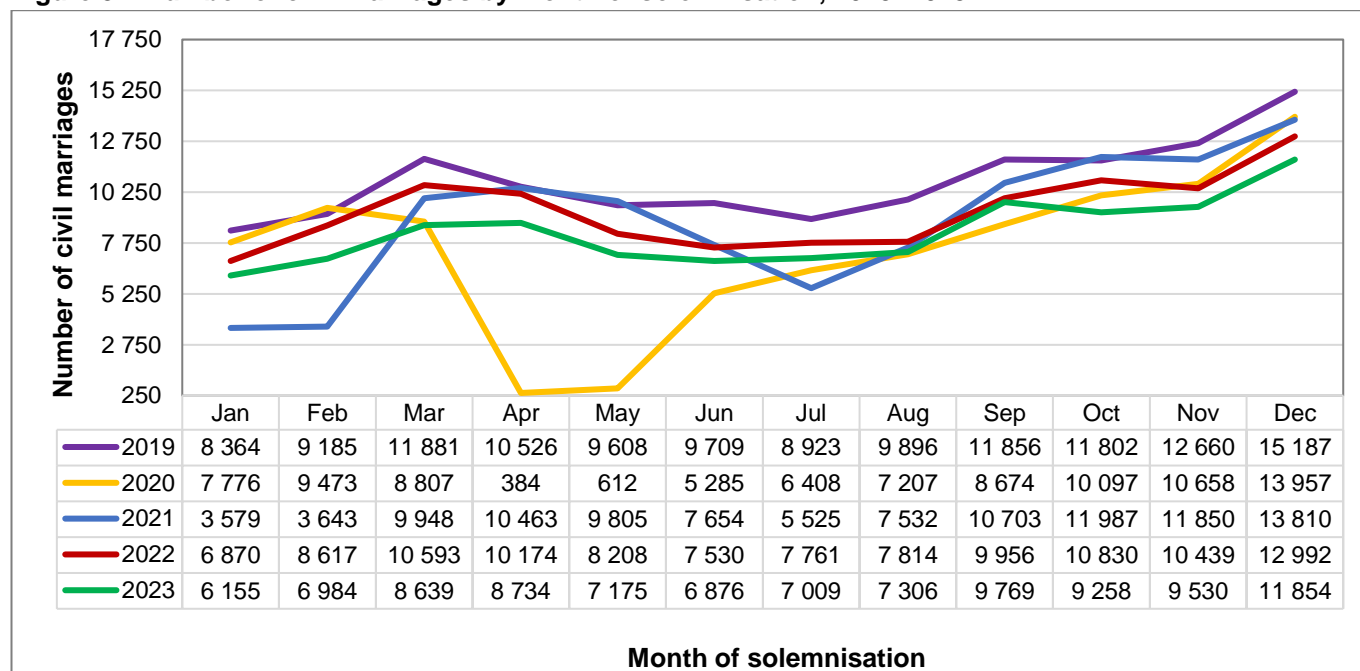
Figure 2 below shows that 94,2% of the total civil marriages registered in 2023, occurred in the same year. Generally, since 2019 there is a similar pattern of marriage occurrence and registration.

Figure 2 – Percentage distribution of civil marriages by year of registration and occurrence, 2019–2023



The seasonal monthly variation in the registration of civil marriages is observed in Figure 3 below. Generally, the warmer months (beginning from September and peaking in December) are the most popular months for solemnising civil marriages in South Africa. In 2023, the highest number of marriages [11 854 (11,9%)] took place in December and the lowest number of marriages, [6 155 (6,2%)] occurred in January. The national lockdown regulations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on marriage solemnisation between 2020 and 2021, hence the slightly different pattern for the two years.

Figure 3 – Number of civil marriages by month of solemnisation, 2019–2023



2.1.2 Solemnisation of civil marriages

The Marriage Act, 1961 (Act No. 25 of 1961) requires that only licensed marriage officers solemnise civil marriages and issue a marriage certificate. Civil marriages are generally solemnised by civil marriage officers at DHA offices and by religious marriage officers at chapels or religious buildings. After a solemnisation ceremony, the marriage officer issues the couple with an abridged hand-written marriage certificate, at no cost, and submits to the marriage register at the DHA office where they are registered, for the recording of the marriage particulars in the National Population Register (NPR).

Table 1 on page 4 shows the distribution of civil marriages registered in 2023 according to the way in which the marriage was solemnised. Under 'way of solemnisation', the terms: (i) 'DHA' is used for marriages solemnised by civil marriage officers and (ii) 'Religious' for marriages solemnised by priests/religious persons who are marriage officers. It is observed that more than half, 56 028 (56,4%) of the 99 289 marriages were solemnised by DHA marriage officers and 30 877 (31,1%) by 'Religious' rites. The type of solemnisation rite was not specified in 12 384 (12,5%) marriages. Table 1 further shows that 288 (0,3%) marriages of South African citizens and permanent residents were solemnised outside the borders of South Africa but subsequently registered in South Africa.

The table also provides information on provincial variations in marriage registrations. The province of registration is not necessarily the province of usual residence of the couple since couples could marry at any place of their choice. The results indicate that, in 2023, the highest number of marriages was registered in Gauteng [26 054 (26,0%)] and the lowest in Northern Cape [2 956 (3,0%)]. Looking at ways of marriage solemnisation within each province, Limpopo had the highest proportion of marriages, 74,7% (5 343) solemnised by civil marriage officers. Western Cape recorded the highest proportion, 48,1% (7 323) of marriages solemnised by religious

marriage officers. Wide differences of 'unspecified' way of solemnisation by province were noted. For example, 33,5% (1 751) of marriages in Mpumalanga had 'unspecified' method of solemnisation compared with 2,6% (390) in Western Cape.

Table 1 – Number and percentage distribution of civil marriages by province of marriage registration and way of solemnisation, 2023

Province of registration	Grand Total	Way of solemnisation			%			
		DHA	Religious	Unspecified	Total	DHA	Religious	Unspecified
Grand Total	99 289	56 028	30 877	12 384	100,0	56,4	31,1	12,5
Western Cape	15 240	7 527	7 323	390	100,0	49,4	48,1	2,6
Eastern Cape	9 392	5 035	3 106	1 251	100,0	53,6	33,1	13,3
Northern Cape	2 956	1 490	699	767	100,0	50,4	23,6	25,9
Free State	6 095	4 484	1 388	223	100,0	73,6	22,8	3,7
KwaZulu-Natal	15 967	9 725	4 391	1 851	100,0	60,9	27,5	11,6
North West	6 230	3 423	2 494	313	100,0	54,9	40,0	5,0
Gauteng	26 054	14 830	6 481	4 743	100,0	56,9	24,9	18,2
Mpumalanga	5 226	2 105	1 370	1 751	100,0	40,3	26,2	33,5
Limpopo	7 150	5 343	715	1 092	100,0	74,7	10,0	15,3
Outside RSA	288	284	4	-	100,0	98,6	1,4	0,0
Unspecified	4 691	1 782	2 906	3	100,0	38,0	61,9	0,1

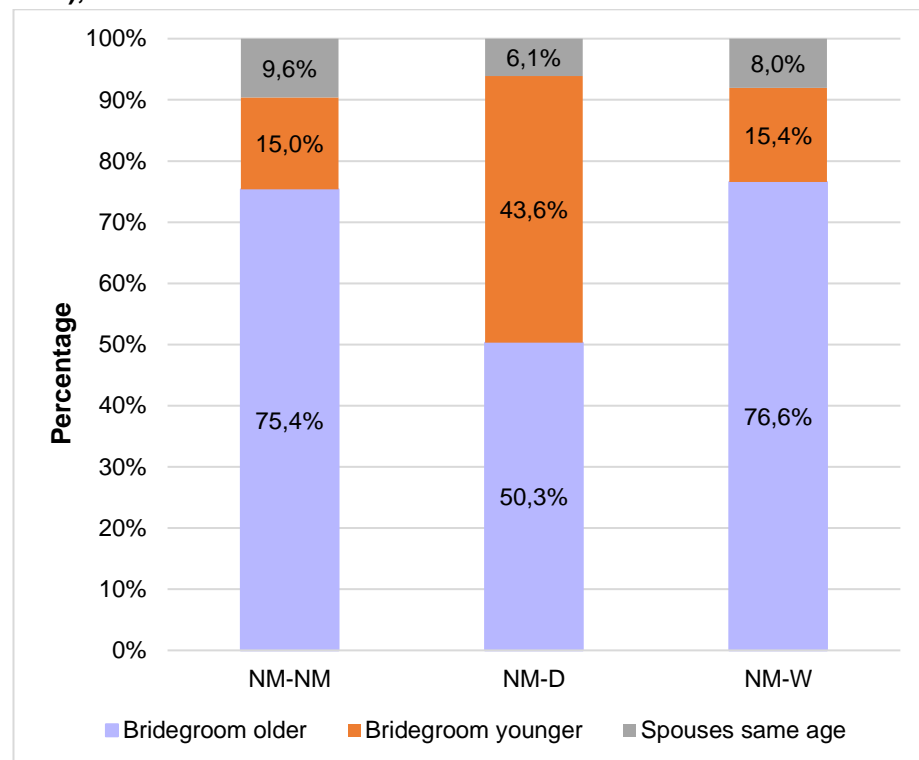
2.1.3 Marital status at the time of civil marriage

Table 2 – Number of civil marriages by province of registration and marital status of bridegrooms and brides at the time of marriage, 2023

Province of registration	Bridegrooms/ Men					Brides/ Women				
	Never married	Divorcee	Widower	Unspecified	Total	Never married	Divorcee	Widow	Unspecified	Total
Grand Total	79 693	4 258	522	14 816	99 289	84 571	2 769	378	11 571	99 289
Western Cape	11 961	788	12	2 479	15 240	12 523	523	3	2 191	15 240
Eastern Cape	7 381	494	39	1 478	9 392	7 928	308	13	1 143	9 392
Northern Cape	2 320	192	6	438	2 956	2 539	105	4	308	2 956
Free State	4 786	270	33	1 006	6 095	5 102	216	37	740	6 095
KwaZulu-Natal	13 156	608	120	2 083	15 967	14 062	309	63	1 533	15 967
North West	5 037	280	17	896	6 230	5 453	184	11	582	6 230
Gauteng	20 752	953	128	4 221	26 054	21 745	726	115	3 468	26 054
Mpumalanga	4 293	228	38	667	5 226	4 556	112	31	527	5 226
Limpopo	6 002	262	82	804	7 150	6 498	117	46	489	7 150
Outside RSA	240	6	3	39	288	265	3	-	20	288
Unspecified	3 765	177	44	705	4 691	3 900	166	55	570	4 691

Table 2 above shows the number of civil marriages for bridegrooms and brides by marital status at the time of marriage in 2023 and province of registration. The table indicates that the majority of marriages in 2023 for both bridegrooms and brides were first-time marriages in all provinces. For bridegrooms, there were 79 693 (80,3%) never married men, 4 258 (4,3%) divorcees and 522 (0,5%) widowers. For the brides, there were 84 571 (85,2%) never married women whilst 2 769 (2,8%) were divorcees and 378 (0,4%) were widows. The marital status of 14 816 (14,9%) bridegrooms and 11 571 (11,7%) brides was unspecified. The profile of those that were remarrying showed that remarriages were more prevalent in divorcees compared to the widowed, 4 258 (4,3%) bridegroom divorcees compared to 522 (0,5%) widowers and 2 769 (2,8%) bride divorcees compared to 378 (0,4%) widows. Looking at marital status in each province, a high proportion of marriages between bridegrooms and brides marrying for the first time was observed in Limpopo, 6 002 (83,9%) and 6 498 (90,9%) respectively.

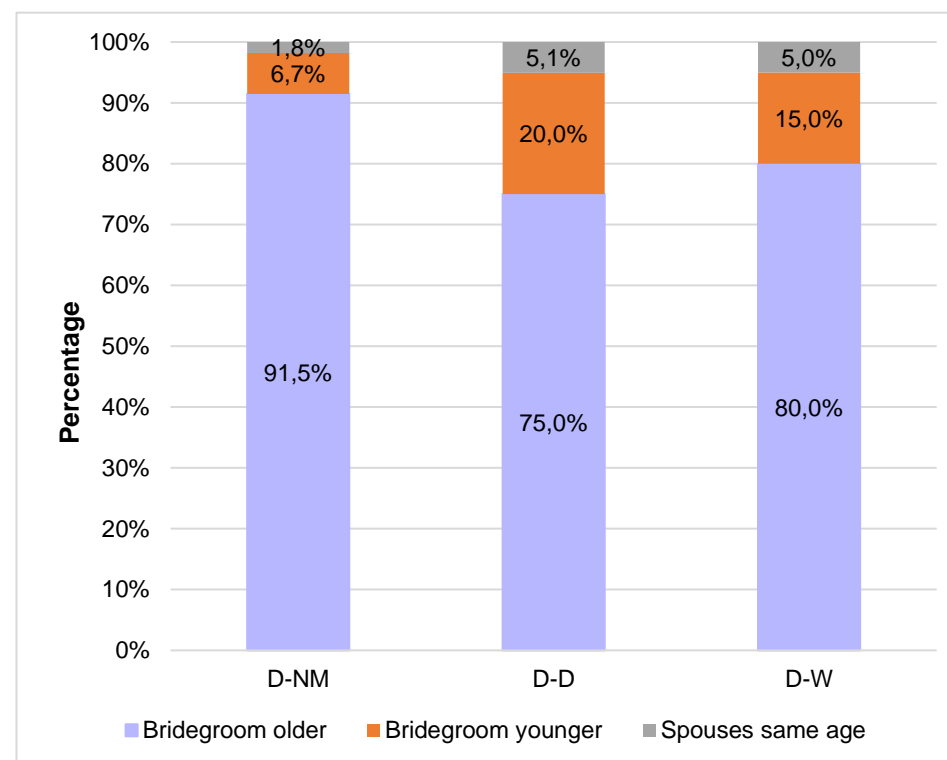
Figure 4a – Percentage distribution of civil marriages by age differences between spouses and marital status at the time of marriage (never married men), 2023



*Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding up

NM – NM = Never married men to Never married women
 NM – D = Never married men to Divorcee
 NM – W = Never married men to Widow

Figure 4b – Percentage distribution of civil marriages by age differences between spouses and marital status at the time of marriages (male divorcees), 2023

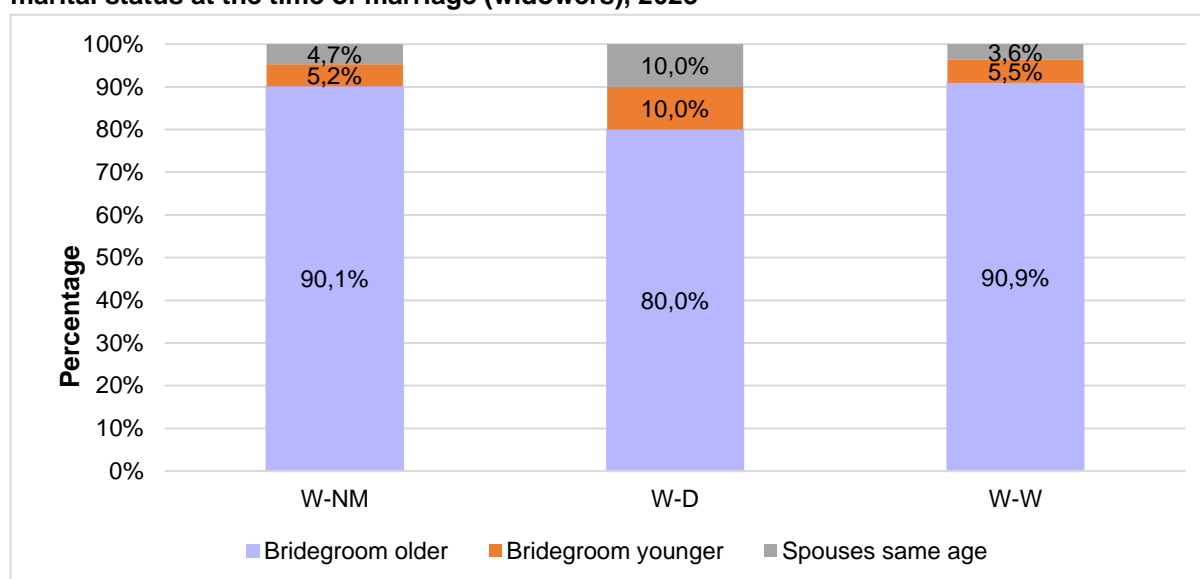


*Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding up

D – NM = Divorcee to Never married women
 D – D = Divorcee to Divorcee
 D – W = Divorcee to Widow

It is observed on Figure 4a to 4c on pages 6 and 7 that most men married women who have never been married. This observed age pattern is the same irrespective of the marital status of the bridegroom at the time of marriage. However, the magnitude differs by the marital status of the spouses at the time of marriage. For example, 43,6% of never married men who married divorcees were younger than their brides (see Figure 4a) and 20,0% of male divorcees who married widowed women were also younger than their brides (see Figure 4b).

Figure 4c – Percentage distribution of civil marriages by age differences between spouses and marital status at the time of marriage (widowers), 2023



*Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding up

W – NM = Widower to Never married women

W – D = Widower to Divorcee

W – W = Widower to Widow

It is observed on Figure 4c above that majority of widowed men married women who have never been married before, 90,1%. The proportion of widowers who married older widows was 5,5% and widowers who married widows of their same age was 3,6%.

Figure 5 – Number of civil marriages for never married men and never married women by age group, 2023

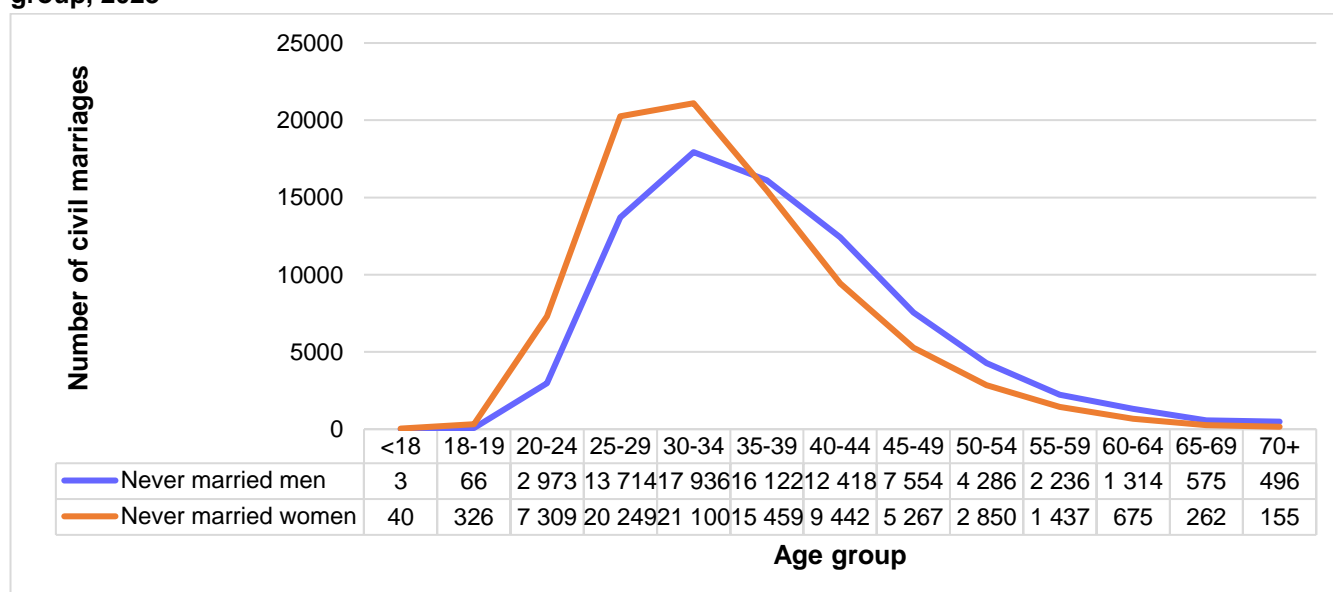


Figure 5 above indicates that the highest number of never married men and women were aged 30–34 years, 17 936 (22,5%) and 21 100 (24,9%) respectively. Figure 5 further shows that there were more women who were never married compared to men who were never married at younger ages (less than 35 years) and vice versa at older ages (35 years and older).

Table 3 – Number of civil marriages by age differences between spouses at the time of marriage and marital status of husband, 2023

Husband Marital Status	Wife Marital Status	Grand Total	Age differences		
			Bridegroom Older	Bridegroom Younger	Same Age
	Grand Total	99 289	74 703	16 013	8 573
Never Married	Total	79 693	58 777	13 330	7 586
	Never Married	74 796	56 382	11 212	7 202
	Divorcee	920	463	401	56
	Widow	286	219	44	23
	Unspecified	3 691	1 713	1 673	305
Divorcee	Total	4 258	3 633	480	145
	Never Married	2 217	2 028	149	40
	Divorcee	831	623	166	42
	Widow	20	16	3	1
	Unspecified	1 190	966	162	62
Widower	Total	522	470	27	25
	Never Married	445	401	23	21
	Divorcee	10	8	1	1
	Widow	55	50	3	2
	Unspecified	12	11	-	1
Unspecified	Total	14 816	11 823	2 176	817
	Never Married	7 113	6 252	608	253
	Divorcee	1 008	635	290	83
	Widow	17	16	1	-
	Unspecified	6 678	4 920	1 277	481

Table 3 above suggests that men tend to marry younger women, as 74 703 (75,2%) of the 99 289 bridegrooms were older than their brides. However, 16 013 (16,1%) bridegrooms were younger than their brides and 8 573 (8,6%) were the same age as their brides. This observed age pattern is the same irrespective of the marital status of the bridegroom at the time of marriage. However, the magnitude differs by the marital status of the spouses at the time of marriage.

2.1.4 Age at the time of civil marriage

Population scientists are interested in the age at first marriage or union because of its theoretical link to exposure to the possibility of pregnancy, childbearing and ultimately to fertility (Bongaarts, 1978). This link tends to be weakened in populations where pre-marital fertility is widespread. Nevertheless, age at first marriage or union continues to be a good proxy for measuring not only fertility but other health and socio-economic indicators relating particularly to the role and status of women in society. The importance of this indicator is, to some extent, underscored in South Africa through the marriage legislations that put restrictions on marriages involving children under 18 years. These children require the consent of a parent, a guardian or a commissioner of child welfare before entering into a marriage. In addition to the above consent, boys younger than 18 years and girls younger than 15 years of age require the consent of the Minister of Home Affairs before they can get married.

Figure 6a – Median age of bridegrooms and brides at the time of civil marriage, 2019–2023

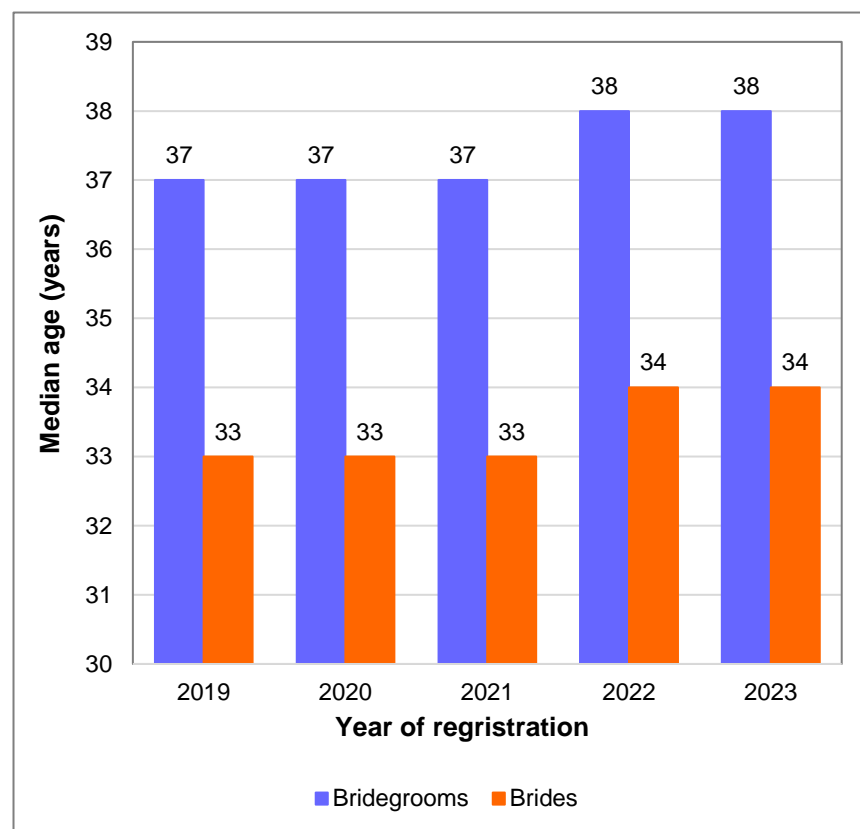


Figure 6b – Median age of never married men and women at the time of civil marriage, 2019–2023

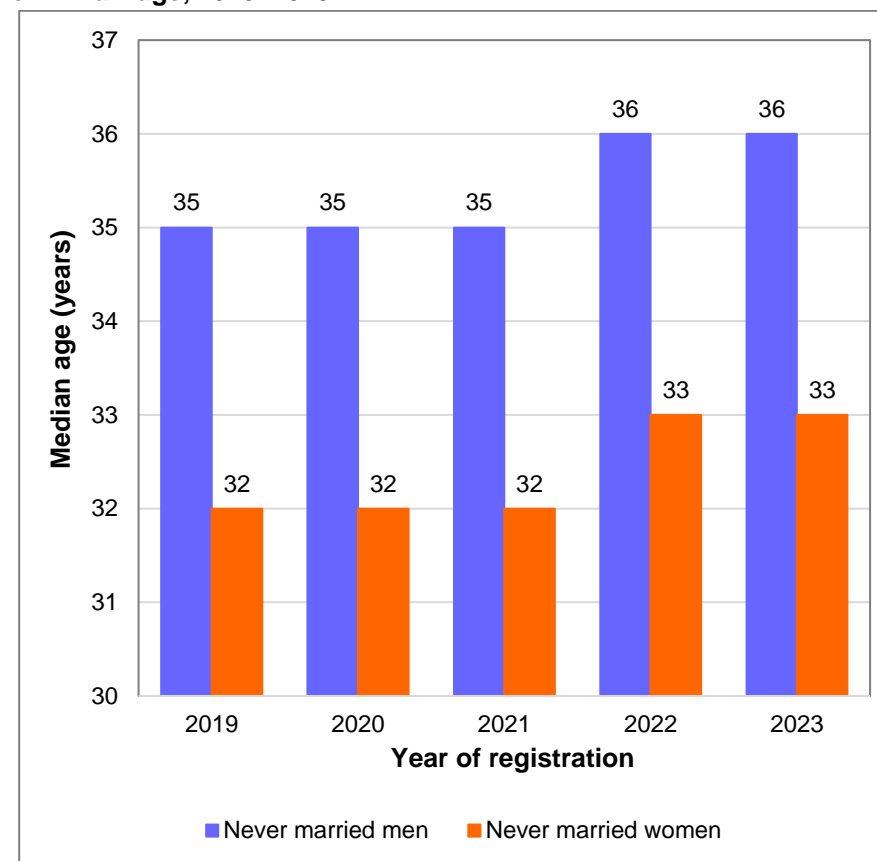


Figure 6a above shows that the median age of bridegrooms is consistently higher than the median age of brides. The median ages of bridegrooms and brides remained the same from 2019 to 2021 with 37 years and 33 years for bridegrooms and brides respectively. The median age has increased to 38 years for bridegrooms and 34 years for brides in 2022 and 2023. The median age of couples marrying for the first time is shown on Figure 6b. The median ages of never married men increased from 35 years in 2019 to 36 years in 2023 whilst that of never married women increased from 32 years to 33 years during the same period.

Figure 6c – Median age of male and female divorcees at the time of civil marriage, 2019–2023

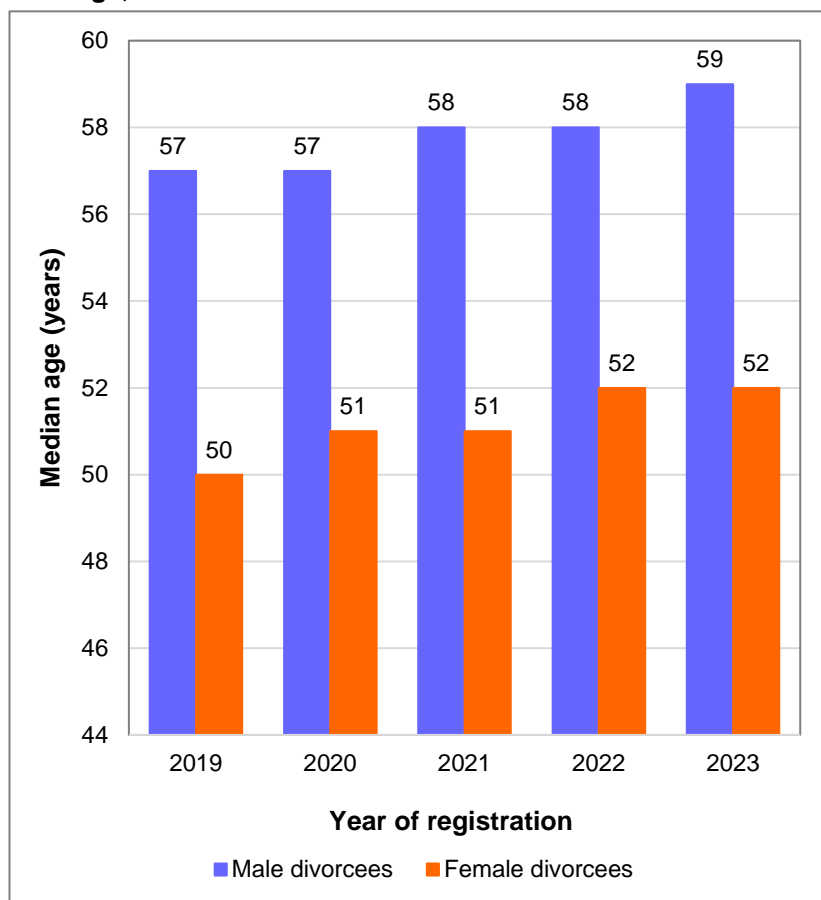


Figure 6d – Median age of widowers and widows at the time of civil marriage, 2019–2023

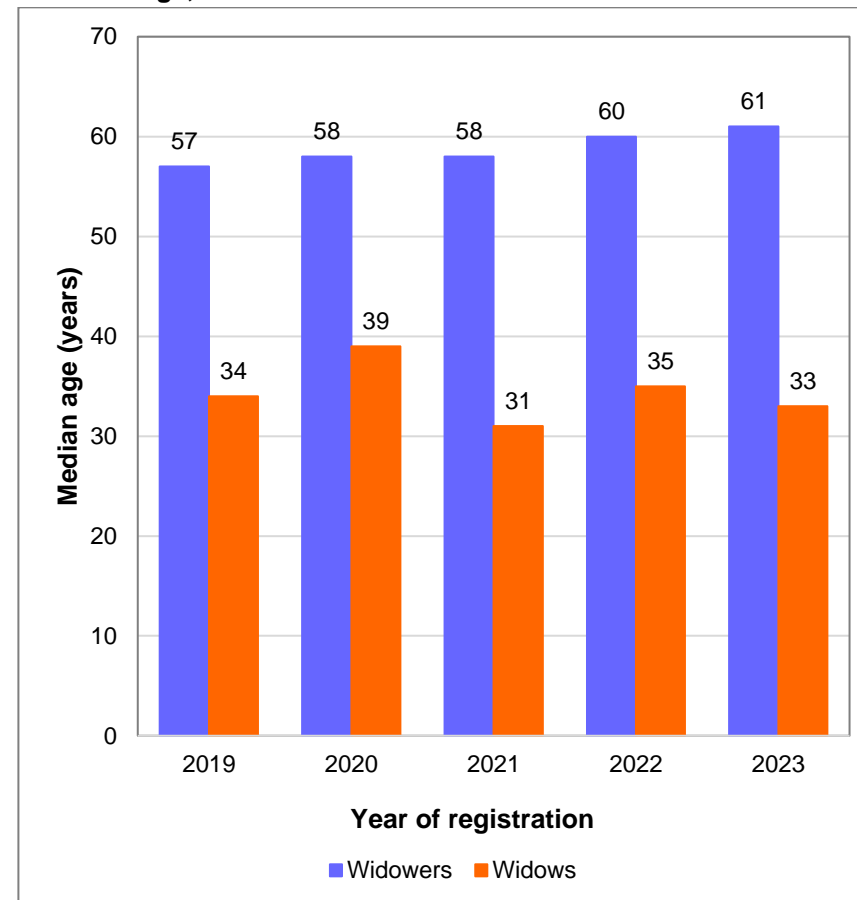


Figure 6c and Figure 6d show the median ages at marriage for the divorced and widowed. The median age of male divorcees increased from 57 years in 2019 to 59 years in 2023 and the median age of female divorcees increased from 50 years to 52 years during the same period. There was a seven-year age difference in the median ages between male and female divorcees who married in 2023. The median ages of widowers and widows in 2023 were 61 years and 33 years respectively, resulting in a 28-year age gap.

2.2 Customary marriages

2.2.1 Trends in the registration of customary marriages (2014–2023)

The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, 1998 (Act No. 120 of 1998) prescribes that customary marriages that were entered into after the commencement of this Act must be registered within three months after the conclusion of the marriage and those entered before the Act to be registered within 12 months of the commencement of the Act.

In 2023, 3 537 customary marriages were registered at the DHA, indicating a decrease of 19,2% from 4 376 customary marriages registered in 2022. It is observed from Figure 7 below that the number of registered customary marriages have been fluctuating over the 10-year period, 2014 to 2023. The highest number of registered customary marriages was recorded in 2022 (4 376) whilst the lowest number was recorded in 2020 (1 585).

Figure 7 – Number of registered customary marriages in South Africa, 2014–2023

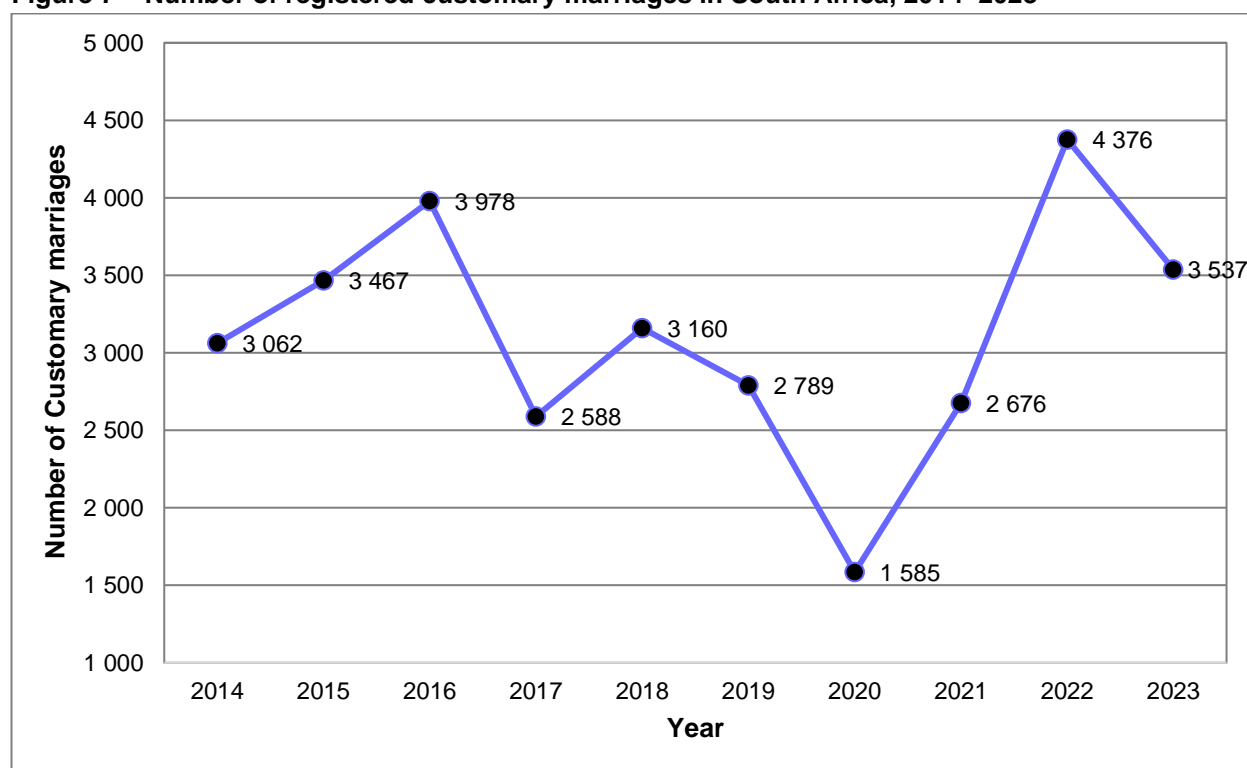


Figure 8 – Percentage distribution of customary marriages by year of registration and occurrence, 2019–2023

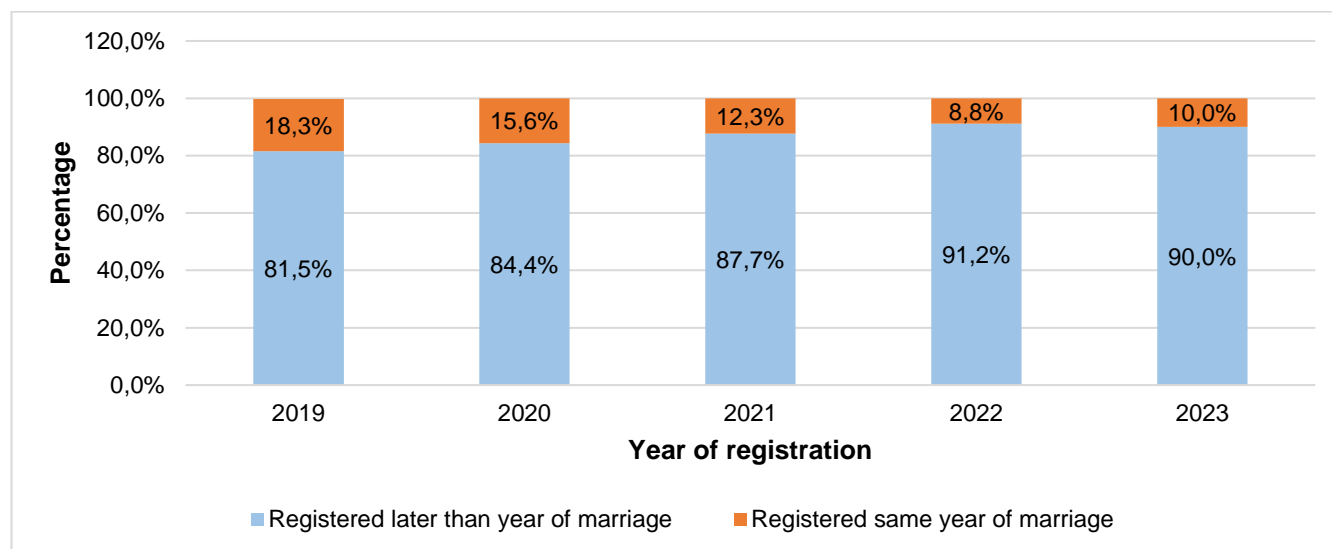
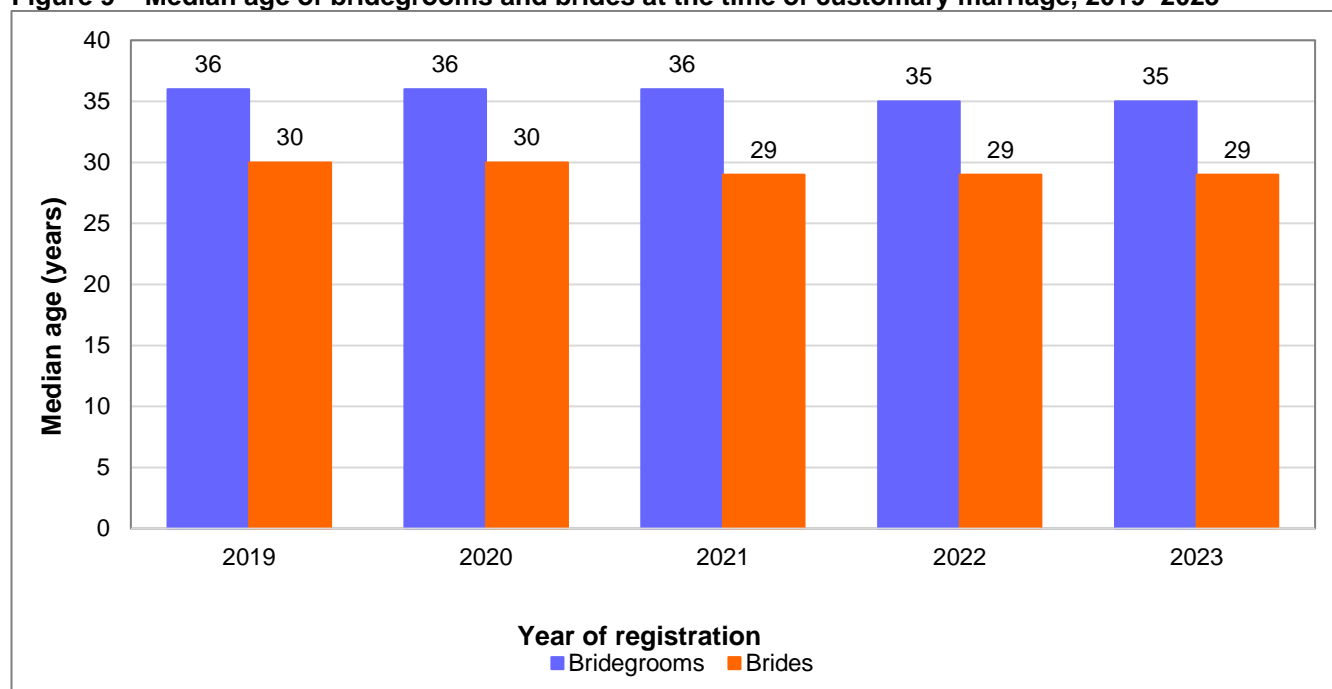


Figure 8 above shows that majority of customary marriages were registered later than the year of marriage occurrence. In 2023, about 10,0% of marriages were registered the same year they took place. Unlike with civil marriages, couples marrying under customary marriages turn to register their marriages years after the event has occurred.

2.2.2 Age at the time of customary marriage

Figure 9 – Median age of bridegrooms and brides at the time of customary marriage, 2019–2023



The median ages at the time of customary marriage are presented in Figure 9 above. Similar to civil marriages, bridegrooms were generally older than brides, with an age difference of about six to seven years for customary marriages registered between 2019 and 2023. The median age of bridegrooms ranged between 35 years and 36 years whereas that of bride ranged between 29 years and 30 years.

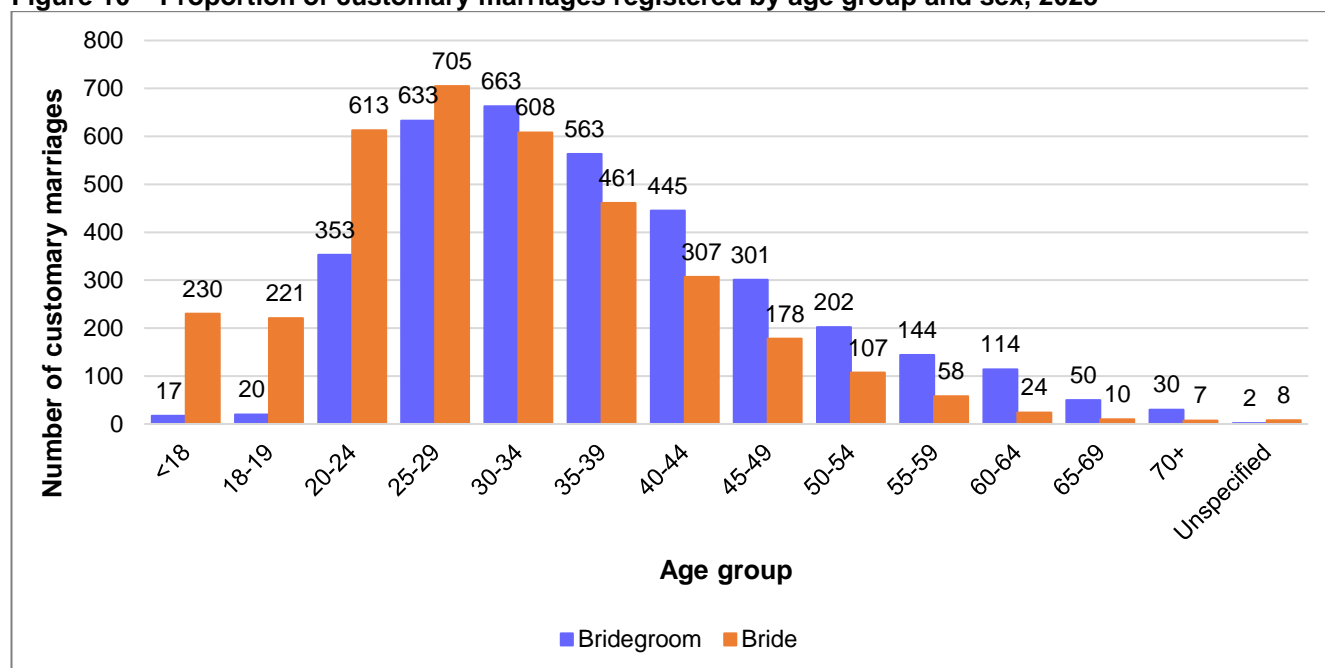
Figure 10 – Proportion of customary marriages registered by age group and sex, 2023

Figure 10 above shows that more bridegrooms were aged 30–34 years 663 (18,7%) and more brides were aged 25–29 years 705 (19,9%). Marriages for children aged less than 18 years were more likely for brides 230 (6,5%) than bridegrooms 17 (0,5%). Detailed information on age distributions of bridegrooms and brides by year of marriage occurrences is shown on Annexures C and D on pages 35 and 36, respectively.

Table 4 – Number and percentage distribution of customary marriages by province of marriage registration and age difference, 2023

Province of registration	Number					%				
	Total	Bridegroom older	Bridegroom younger	Same age	Unspecified	Total	Bridegroom older	Bridegroom younger	Same age	Unspecified
Total	3 537	3 079	319	129	10	100,0	87,1	9,0	3,6	0,3
Western Cape	32	28	2	2	-	100,0	87,5	6,3	6,3	0,0
Eastern Cape	652	590	50	12	-	100,0	90,5	7,7	1,8	0,0
Northern Cape	38	35	2	1	-	100,0	92,1	5,3	2,6	0,0
Free State	85	70	12	3	-	100,0	82,4	14,1	3,5	0,0
KwaZulu-Natal	789	670	77	38	4	100,0	84,9	9,8	4,8	0,5
North West	95	77	16	2	-	100,0	81,1	16,8	2,1	0,0
Gauteng	360	297	41	20	2	100,0	82,5	11,4	5,6	0,6
Mpumalanga	474	401	50	23	-	100,0	84,6	10,5	4,9	0,0
Limpopo	942	851	61	26	4	100,0	90,3	6,5	2,8	0,4
Outside RSA	18	16	2	-	-	100,0	88,9	12,5	0,0	0,0
Unknown	35	29	4	2	-	100,0	82,9	11,4	5,7	0,0
Unspecified	17	15	2	-	-	100,0	88,2	11,8	0,0	0,0

The results presented in Table 4 above show that in 2023, about 942 (26,6%) of the registered customary marriages were from Limpopo followed by KwaZulu-Natal, 789 (22,3%), Eastern Cape 652(18,4%), Mpumalanga 474 (13,4%) and Gauteng 360 (10,2%). The other remaining four (4) provinces had less than 10% each.

2.2.3 Marital status at the time of customary marriage

Since the Customary Marriages Act of 1998 recognises polygyny, a husband who has registered his marriage under the Act is permitted to register additional marriages under the Act provided he adheres to the regulations under the Act regarding his property. That is, at his own cost, the husband must get an order from a competent court that will regulate his future matrimonial property system. It would be of interest to distinguish between first-time spouses and those who have previously married (i.e. those in polygynous marriages, divorcees, widows and widowers). However, the information is not available in the dataset provided.

2.3 Civil unions

2.3.1 Trends in the registration of civil unions (2014–2023)

Figure 11 below shows that in 2023, 2 297 civil unions were registered. The number of civil unions registered in South Africa increased between 2014 and 2022 except a decrease in 2020 and 2023. Civil unions registered decreased by 6,7% from 2 461 in 2022 to 2 297 in 2023.

Figure 11 – Number of registered civil unions in South Africa, 2014–2023

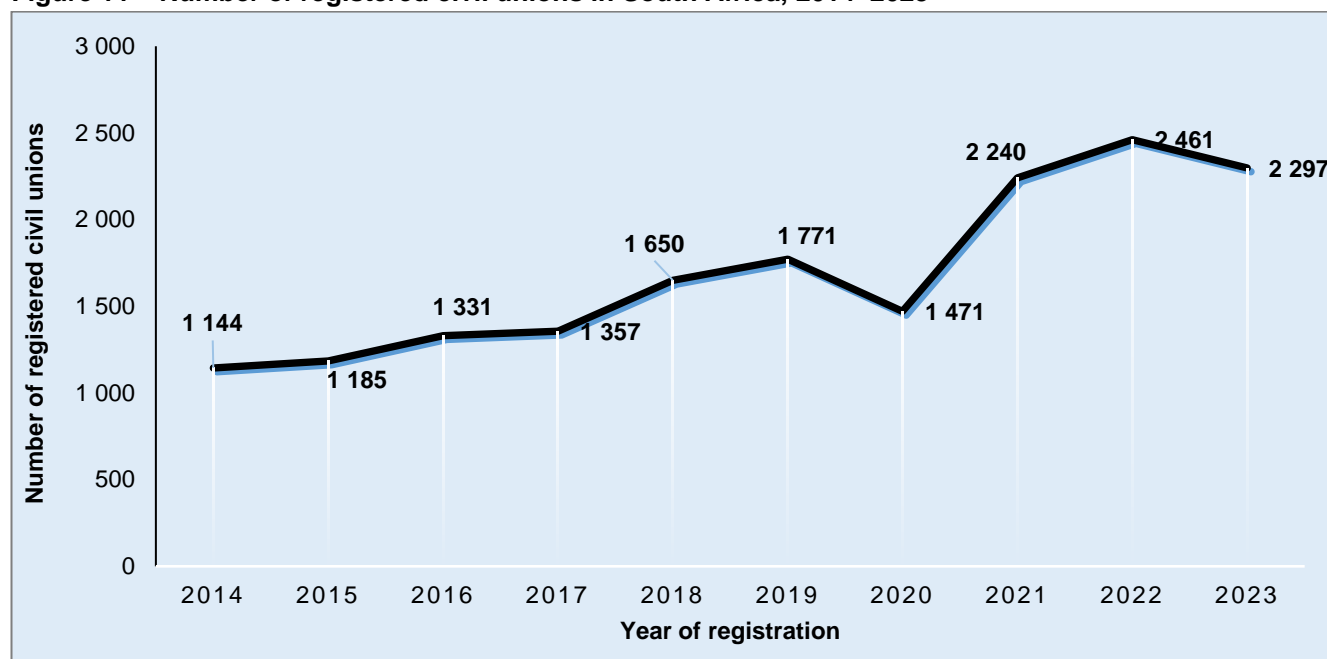


Figure 12 below indicates that most civil unions were registered the same year the event occurred, thus 94,3% of civil unions that were registered in 2023, took place that same year.

Figure 12 – Percentage distribution of civil unions by year of registration and occurrence, 2019–2023

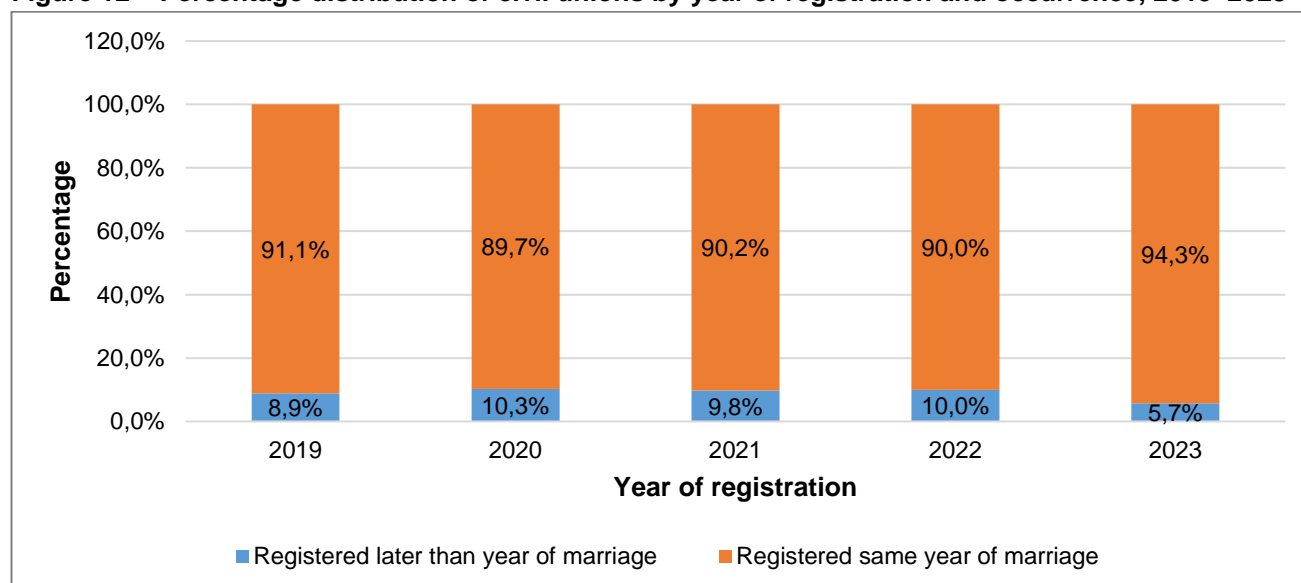


Table 5 – Number and percentage distribution of civil unions registered by province of registration, 2019–2023

Province of registration	Number					%				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Grand Total	1 771	1 471	2 240	2 461	2 297	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Western Cape	443	434	553	721	661	25,0	29,5	24,7	29,3	28,8
Eastern Cape	64	48	53	90	123	3,6	3,3	2,4	3,7	5,4
Northern Cape	18	6	20	23	26	1,0	0,4	0,9	0,9	1,1
Free State	48	32	50	52	41	2,7	2,2	2,2	2,1	1,8
KwaZulu-Natal	216	168	209	378	324	12,2	11,4	9,3	15,4	14,1
North West	41	22	44	37	57	2,3	1,5	2,0	1,5	2,5
Gauteng	779	659	1193	1032	961	44,0	44,8	53,3	41,9	41,8
Mpumalanga	28	23	26	32	35	1,6	1,6	1,2	1,3	1,5
Limpopo	23	5	16	29	28	1,3	0,3	0,7	1,2	1,2
Outside RSA	6	-	4	3	10	0,3	-	0,2	0,1	0,4
Unspecified	105	74	72	64	31	5,9	5,0	3,2	2,6	1,3

Table 5 above shows that provincial distribution of civil unions registered in 2023 indicates that Gauteng 961 (41,8%) and Western Cape 661 (28,8%) and KwaZulu-Natal 324 (14,1%) were the provinces with the highest number of registrations of civil unions. In total, 84,7% of civil unions in 2023 were registered in these three provinces. The lowest number of registered civil unions was recorded in Limpopo 28 (1,2%) and Northern Cape 26 (1,1%).

2.3.2 Age at the time of civil union

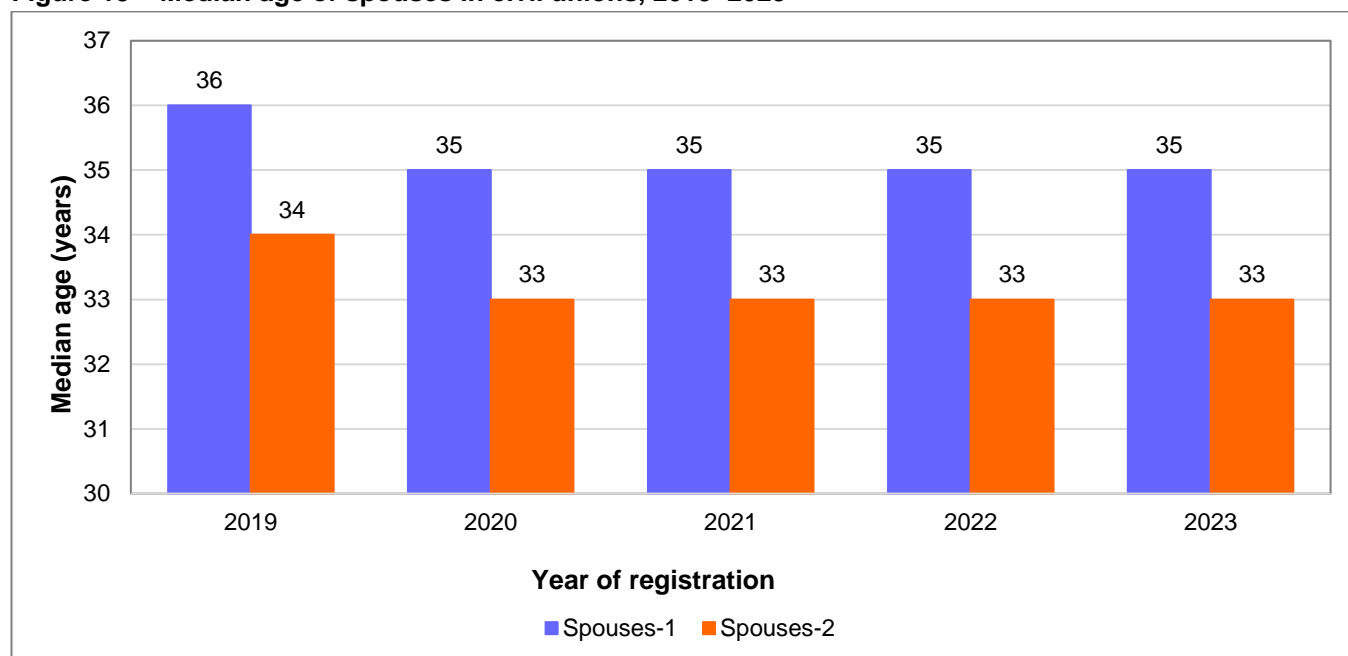
Table 6 – Number of civil unions by age group of spouses, 2023

Age	Spouse-1	%	Spouse-2	%
Total	2 297	100,0	2 297	100,0
18-19	2	0,1	4	0,2
20-24	67	2,9	143	6,2
25-29	399	17,4	537	23,4
30-34	609	26,5	599	26,1
35-39	459	20,0	407	17,7
40-44	252	11,0	207	9,0
45-49	173	7,5	143	6,2
50-54	137	6,0	124	5,4
55-59	90	3,9	64	2,8
60-64	49	2,1	32	1,4
65-69	29	1,3	16	0,7
70+	31	1,3	21	0,9

The number of civil unions classified by the ages of spouse-1 and spouse-2 at the time of the solemnisation of civil union is presented on Table 6 above. Spouses are distinguished as spouse-1 and spouse-2, based on the information completed by the spouses at the time of civil union registration. The highest number of spouses-1 and spouses-2 were aged 30–34 [609 (26,5%)] and [599 (26,1%)] respectively. Detailed information on age distribution is on Annexure E on page 37.

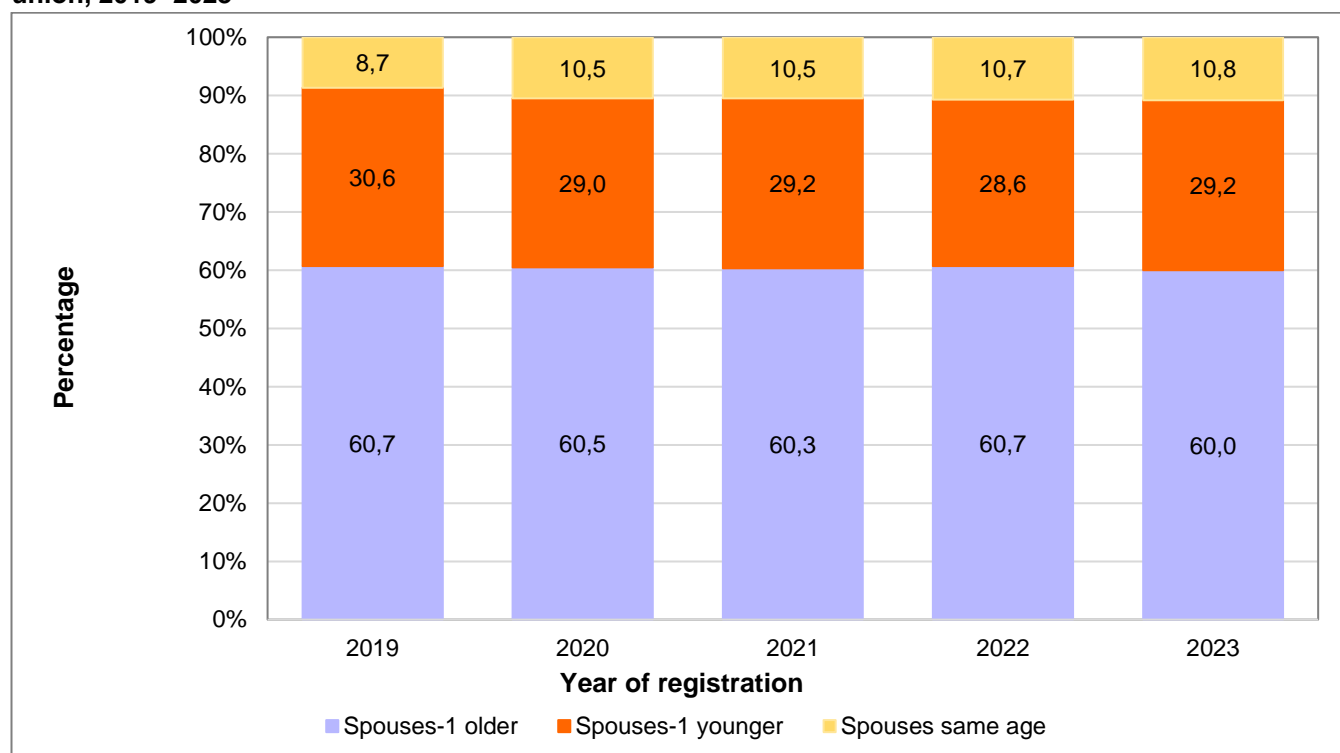
As observed in Figure 13 below, the median ages of spouses-1 were higher than those of spouses-2. The median ages of spouses-1 decreased from 36 years in 2019 to 35 years in 2023 and the median ages of spouses-2 decreased from 34 years to 33 years during the same period. Over the five-year period, the yearly differences in the median ages of spouses-1 and spouses-2 was two years.

Figure 13 – Median age of spouses in civil unions, 2019–2023



Information in Figure 14 below shows that in 2023, 60,0% of spouses-1 were older than their spouses, whilst 29,2% were younger than their spouses and 10,8% were of the same age as their spouses.

Figure 14 – Percentage distribution of civil unions by age differences between spouses at the time of union, 2019–2023



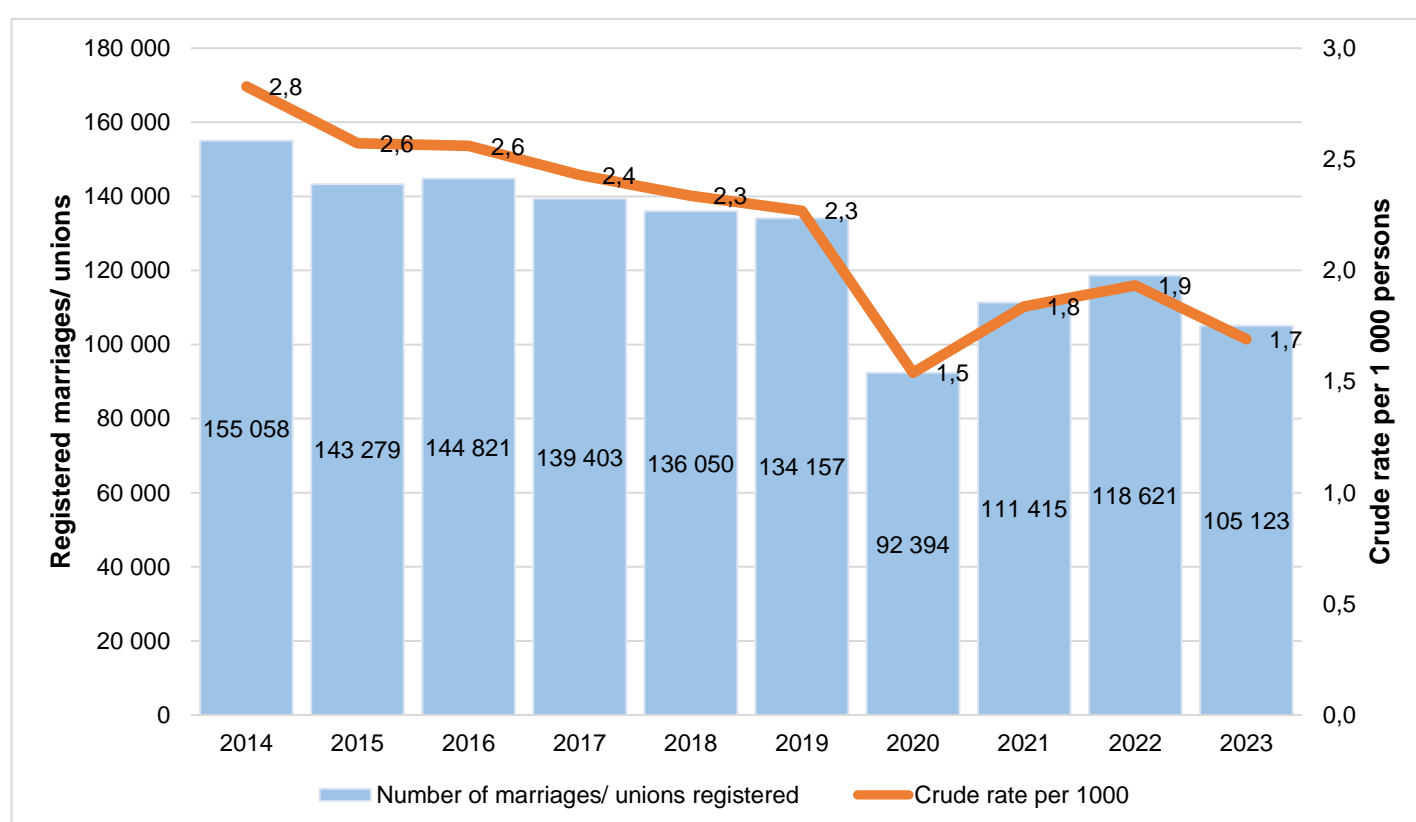
2.3.3 Marital status at the time of civil union

It would be of interest to distinguish between first time spouses and those who had married before (i.e. divorcees, widows and widowers) and the type of marriage relationship in which they were in. However, the information is not available in this particular dataset.

2.4 All marriages and unions

Figure 15 below shows that 105 123 marriages and unions were registered in 2023, a decrease of 49 935 (32,2%) from marriages registered in 2014. Restrictions put in place during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on registration of marriages whereby the lowest crude rate was observed in 2020 with 1,5 per thousand population. The crude marriage rate was 1,7 per thousand population in 2023, which fell by 1,1 per thousand population from the one in 2014.

Figure 15 – Number of marriages and crude marriage rate, 2014–2023



3. Divorces

3.1 Trends in divorces (2014–2023)

Table 7 – Number of published divorces in South Africa by population group, 2014–2023

Year	Total	Numbers						%						
		Black African	Coloured	India/ Asian	White	Mixed	Unspecified	Total	Black African	Coloured	India/ Asian	White	Mixed	Unspecified
2014	24 689	9 167	4 994	1 522	6 970	842	1 194	100,0	37,1	20,2	6,2	28,2	3,4	4,8
2015	25 260	10 841	4 213	1 566	6 588	837	1 215	100,0	42,9	16,7	6,2	26,1	3,3	4,8
2016	25 326	10 641	4 711	1 529	6 293	841	1 311	100,0	42,0	18,6	6,0	24,8	3,3	5,2
2017	25 390	11 309	4 517	1 401	6 048	833	1 282	100,0	44,5	17,8	5,5	23,8	3,3	5,0
2018	25 284	11 721	4 540	1 214	5 780	779	1 250	100,0	46,4	18,0	4,8	22,9	3,1	4,9
2019	23 710	10 677	4 502	1 299	5 268	816	1 148	100,0	45,0	19,0	5,5	22,2	3,4	4,8
2020	16 097	7 566	2 459	983	3 855	484	750	100,0	47,0	15,3	6,1	23,9	3,0	4,7
2021	18 208	9 175	3 202	881	3 652	499	799	100,0	50,4	17,6	4,8	20,1	2,7	4,4
2022	20 196	11 048	3 179	867	3 912	554	636	100,0	54,7	15,7	4,3	19,4	2,7	3,1
2023	22 230	12 362	3 350	915	4 343	672	588	100,0	55,6	15,1	4,1	19,5	3,0	2,6

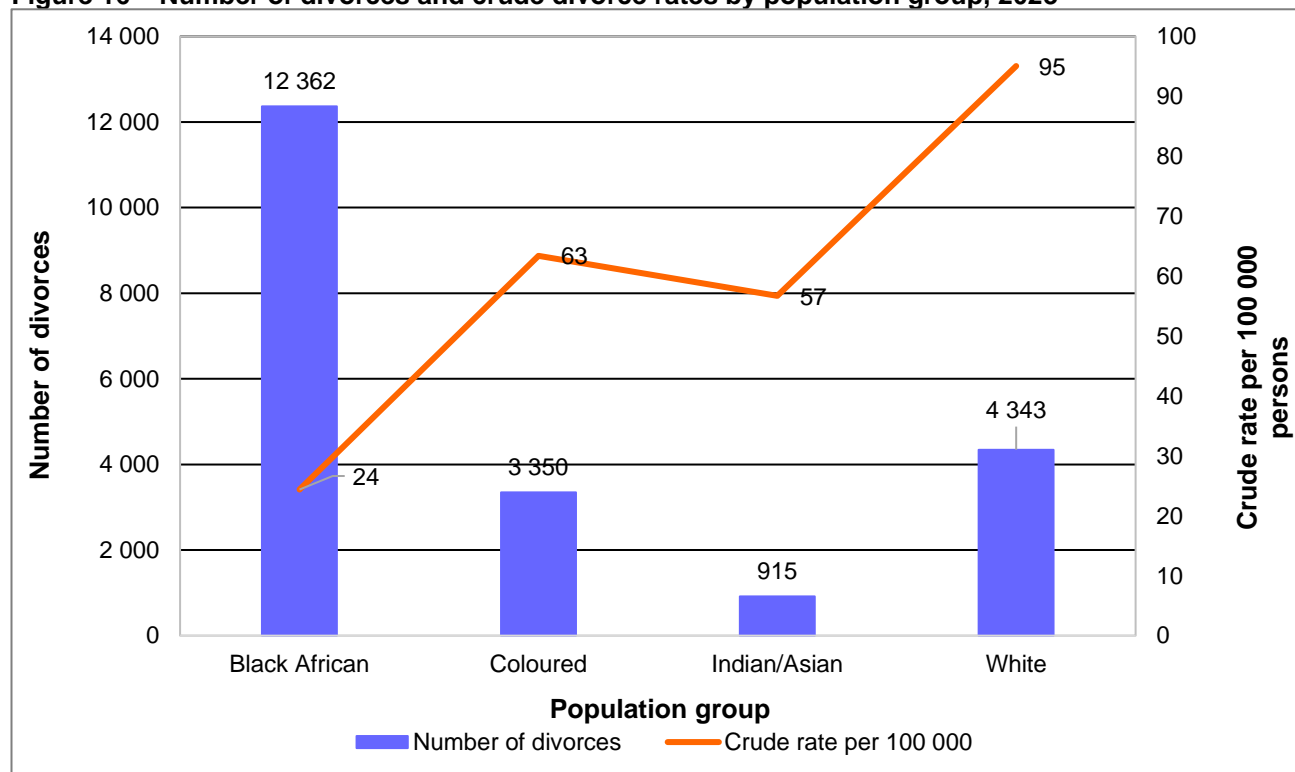
The 2023 divorce data reported in this statistical release is based on 22 230 completed divorce forms that Stats SA received and processed. The number (22 230) indicates an increase of 2 034 (10,1%) divorces from the 20 196 cases processed in 2022, see Table 7 above. The table shows that the total number of divorces increased between 2014 and 2017; and decreased between 2018 and 2020. In 2023, about 241 divorces were granted for same-sex couples. The observed crude divorce rate was 36 divorces per 100 000 resident population in 2023¹.

Table 7 above also provides data on divorces classified by population group and the year in which the divorce was granted. In 2023, black African couples had the highest number of divorces compared to other population groups; this pattern has been the same for the 10-year period (2014 to 2023). About 12 362 (55,6%) of the 22 230 divorces granted in 2023 were from the black African population group, followed by white 4 343 (19,5%), coloured 3 350 (15,1%), India/Asian 915 (4,1%) and divorces from marriages of different population groups (mixed) 672 (3,0%). The population group of 588 (2,6%) couples was not specified.

¹ The crude divorce rate refers to the number of divorces per 100 000 persons in the population

Figure 16 below demonstrates the number of divorces and crude divorce rate by population group. The crude divorce rates by population groups shows that the white population group had the highest rate of 95 per 100 000 estimated resident population, followed by the coloured and Indian/Asian population groups with 63 and 57 per 100 000 respectively. The black African population had 24 per 100 000 estimated resident population.

Figure 16 – Number of divorces and crude divorce rates by population group, 2023



3.2 Characteristics of plaintiffs

The 2023 data presented in Table 8 below show that more wives than husbands, 12 563 (56,5%) women compared to 7 348 (33,1%) men initiated divorce proceedings and 1 105 (5,0%) divorces were initiated by both husband and wife. The sex of the plaintiff was not specified in 1 214 (5,5%) cases. The provincial distribution indicates that Gauteng (6 110), Western Cape (3 730) and KwaZulu-Natal (3 532) were the provinces with the highest number of divorces granted. Together the three provinces contributed 60,2% of the divorces granted in 2023. However, this could also be due to the fact that these provinces have the largest populations.

Table 8 – Number and percentage distribution of divorces by province of divorce registration and plaintiff, 2023

Province of divorce registration	Number					%				
	Total	Husbands	Wives	Both	Unspecified	Total	Husbands	Wives	Both	Unspecified
Grand Total	22 230	7 348	12 563	1 105	1 214	100,0	33,1	56,5	5,0	5,5
Western Cape	3 730	1 264	2 344	65	57	100,0	33,9	62,8	1,7	1,5
Eastern Cape	2 109	602	1 170	237	100	100,0	28,5	55,5	11,2	4,7
Northern Cape	238	68	157	6	7	100,0	28,6	66,0	2,5	2,9
Free State	2 060	768	1 163	55	74	100,0	37,3	56,5	2,7	3,6
KwaZulu-Natal	3 532	1 220	1 863	172	277	100,0	34,5	52,7	4,9	7,8
North West	1 460	524	738	65	133	100,0	35,9	50,5	4,5	9,1
Gauteng	6 110	1 876	3 514	349	371	100,0	30,7	57,5	5,7	6,1
Mpumalanga	1 181	399	638	53	91	100,0	33,8	54,0	4,5	7,7
Limpopo	1 810	627	976	103	104	100,0	34,6	53,9	5,7	5,7

Table 9 below shows that the coloured population group had the highest proportion of women plaintiffs with 63,8%. The proportion of women plaintiffs for white and Indian/Asian population groups were almost 60% each, and black African population group was 53,2%. The plaintiffs for the mixed/ interracial couples show that 59,7% of the divorces were filed by wives. Among black African divorcees, divorce initiated by both partners constituted about 6,3% and was the highest.

Table 9 – Number and percentage distribution of divorces by population group and plaintiff, 2023

Population group	Number					%				
	Total	Husbands	Wives	Both	Unspecified	Total	Husbands	Wives	Both	Unspecified
Grand Total	22 230	7 348	12 563	1 105	1 214	100,0	33,1	56,5	5,0	5,5
Black African	12 362	4 197	6 573	782	810	100,0	34,0	53,2	6,3	6,6
Coloured	3 350	1 027	2 137	102	84	100,0	30,7	63,8	3,0	2,5
Indian/Asian	915	301	545	31	38	100,0	32,9	59,6	3,4	4,2
White	4 343	1 407	2 613	138	185	100,0	32,4	60,2	3,2	4,3
Mixed	672	204	401	32	35	100,0	30,4	59,7	4,8	5,2
Unspecified	588	212	294	20	62	100,0	36,1	50,0	3,4	10,5

Table 10 below indicates information on the occupation of husbands and wives at the time of divorce. It is noted that a high proportion of husbands (35,9%) and wives (38,8%) did not specify the type of occupation they were engaged in at the time of divorce. In addition, 12,9% and 17,7% of husbands and wives respectively were unemployed at the time of divorce. Male divorcees were largely employed in service occupations, 3 520 (15,8%), whereas female divorcees were mostly in professional, semi-professional and technical occupations, 3 799 (17,1%).

Table 10 – Number and percentage distribution of divorces by type of occupation at the time of divorce, 2023

Occupation	Number		%	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Grand total	22 230	22 230	100,0	100,0
Professional, semi-professionals and technical occupations	3 435	3 799	15,5	17,1
Managers and administrators	1 661	1 560	7,5	7,0
Clerical and sales occupations	816	1 622	3,7	7,3
Transport delivery and communications	664	80	3,0	0,4
Services occupations	3 520	2 305	15,8	10,4
Farming and related occupations	81	15	0,4	0,1
Artisans apprentice and related occupations	703	120	3,2	0,5
Production foreman mine and quarry worker	503	163	2,3	0,7
Unemployed	2 866	3 935	12,9	17,7
Unspecified	7 981	8 631	35,9	38,8

3.3 Number of divorces by way of solemnisation of marriage

Information presented in Table 11 below shows that 11 547 (51,9%) of the 2023 divorce cases were from marriages that were solemnised by DHA marriage officers and 8 850 (39,8%) by religious marriage officers. About 67,2% of divorces from the white population group and 63,7% of divorces from the coloured population group were from marriages that were solemnised by religious marriage officers. Most divorces from the black African and Indian/Asian population groups were from marriages that were solemnised by DHA marriage officers, 70,2% and 50,1% respectively.

Table 11 – Number and percentage distribution of divorces by population group and way of solemnisation of the marriage, 2023

Population group	Number				%			
	Total	Religious	DHA	Unspecified	Total	Religious	DHA	Unspecified
Total	22 230	8 850	11 547	1 833	100,0	39,8	51,9	8,2
Black African	12 362	3 019	8 672	671	100,0	24,4	70,2	5,4
Coloured	3 350	2 134	913	303	100,0	63,7	27,3	9,0
Indian/Asian	915	334	458	123	100,0	36,5	50,1	13,4
White	4 343	2 917	850	576	100,0	67,2	19,6	13,3
Mixed	672	262	334	76	100,0	39,0	49,7	11,3
Unspecified	588	184	320	84	100,0	27,4	47,6	12,5

3.4 Number of times married

Results presented in Table 12 below show that the 2023 divorce cases for both men and women were mainly from individuals who had married once. More than 85,0% of divorces for men and women were from first-time marriages compared to 8,8% of men and 7,3% of women from second-time marriages. About 1% of both men (1,0%) and women (0,9%) were divorced for at least three times.

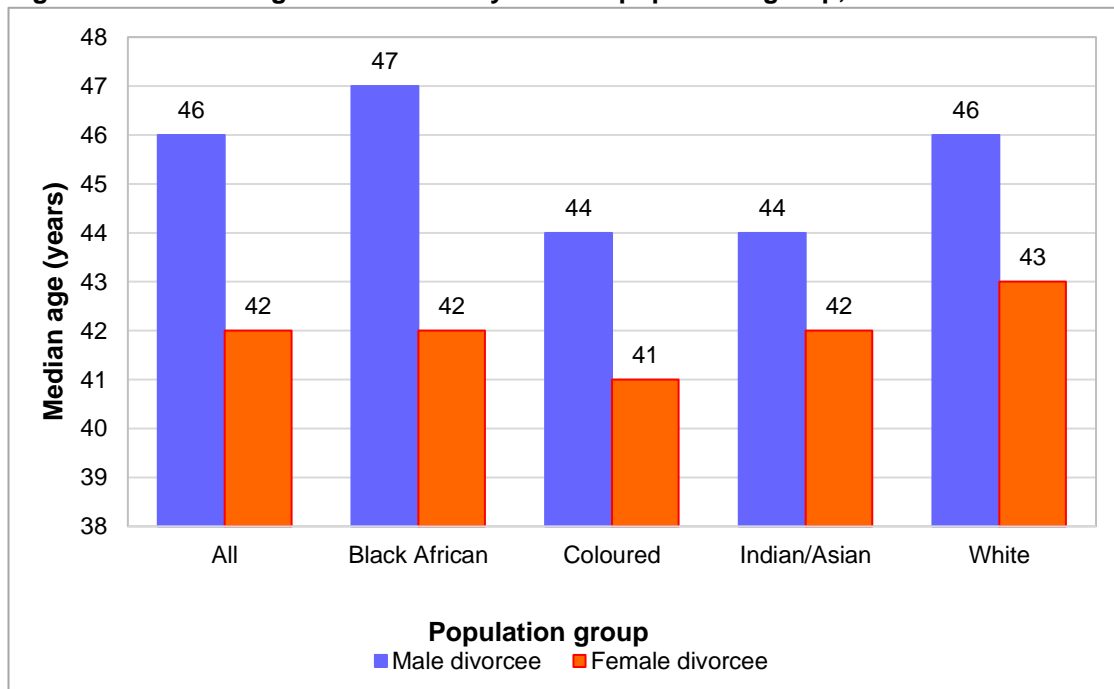
Table 12 – Number and percentage distribution of divorces by number of times married at the time of divorce, 2023

Number of times married	Number		%	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Total	22 230	22 230	100,0	100,0
Once	19 380	19 532	87,2	87,9
Twice	1 949	1 619	8,8	7,3
Three or more	231	193	1,0	0,9
Unspecified	670	886	3,0	4,0

3.5 Age at the time of divorce

The median age at the time of divorce in 2023 was 46 years for males and 42 years for females, indicating that generally, divorced males were older than divorced females, with a difference of about four years (see Figure 17 below). The pattern of median ages in 2023 by population group showed that black African males had the highest median age of 47 years followed by white males with median age of 46 years. The coloured and Indian/Asian males had the median age of 44 years each. The difference in the median ages at the time of divorce between males and females was greater in the black African population group (five years) compared to the coloured and white population with three years and Indian/Asian population with two years.

Figure 17 – Median age of divorcees by sex and population group, 2023



Detailed information on the age and population groups of divorcees is presented in Figure 18 for males and Figure 19 for females below. Although there were differences in the ages at which most men and women from the various population groups divorced, the age patterns were quite similar. There were fewer divorces among the younger (less than 25 years old) and the older (65 years and older) divorcees. For males, the peak age group for all population groups was 40 to 44 years, thus black African had 20,1%, Indian/Asian (19,7%), coloured (18,6%) and white (16,2%). In the case of females, the peak age group at divorce was the same as that of male divorces at 40 to 44 years for all population groups (see Figure 19 below). Actual values on divorce by age group and population group is on Annexure F and Annexure G for males and females respectively on pages 40 and 41, respectively.

Figure 18 – The proportions of divorces by age group and population group (males), 2023

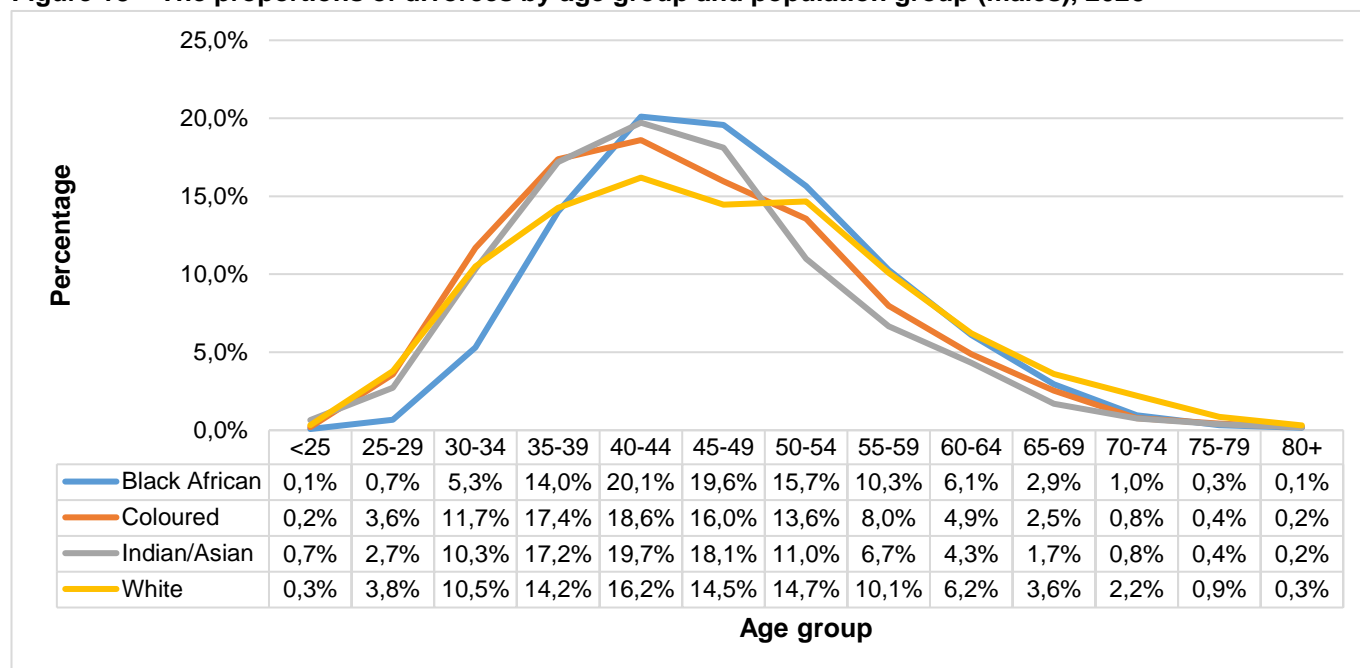
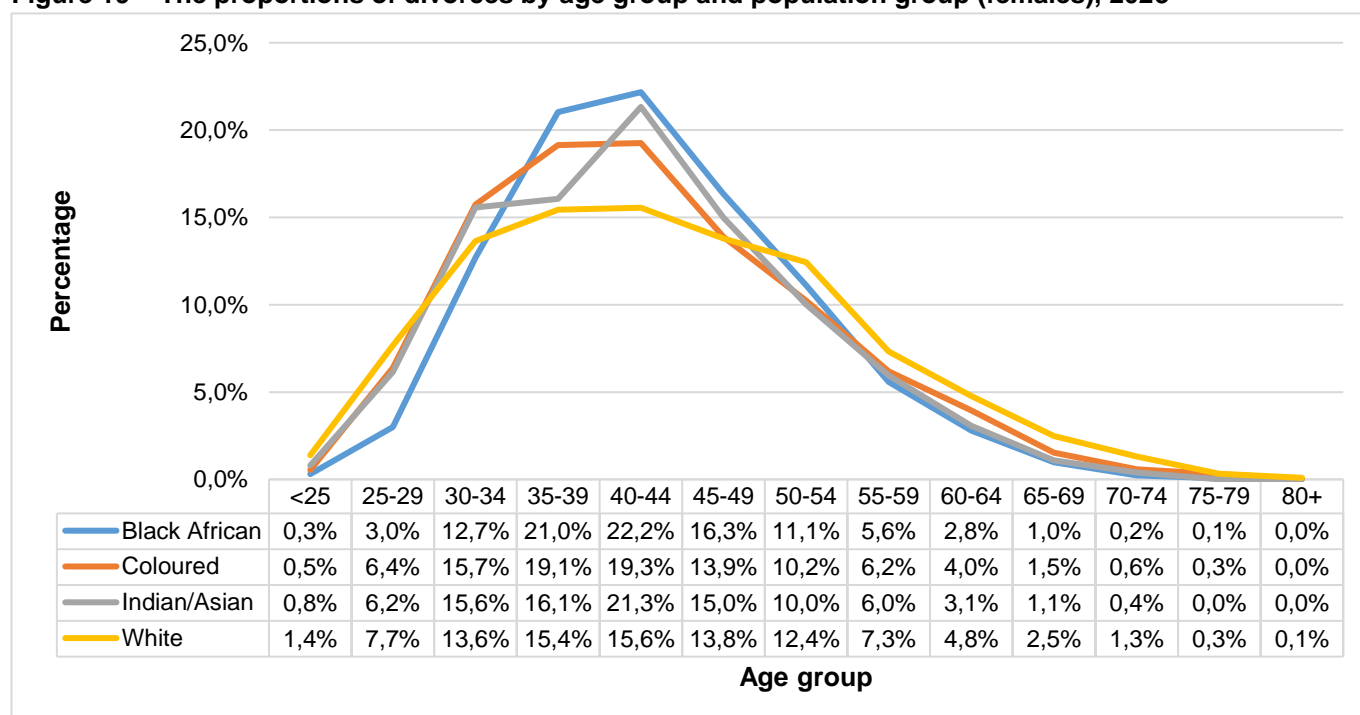


Figure 19 – The proportions of divorces by age group and population group (females), 2023



3.6 Duration of marriage of divorcing couples and population group

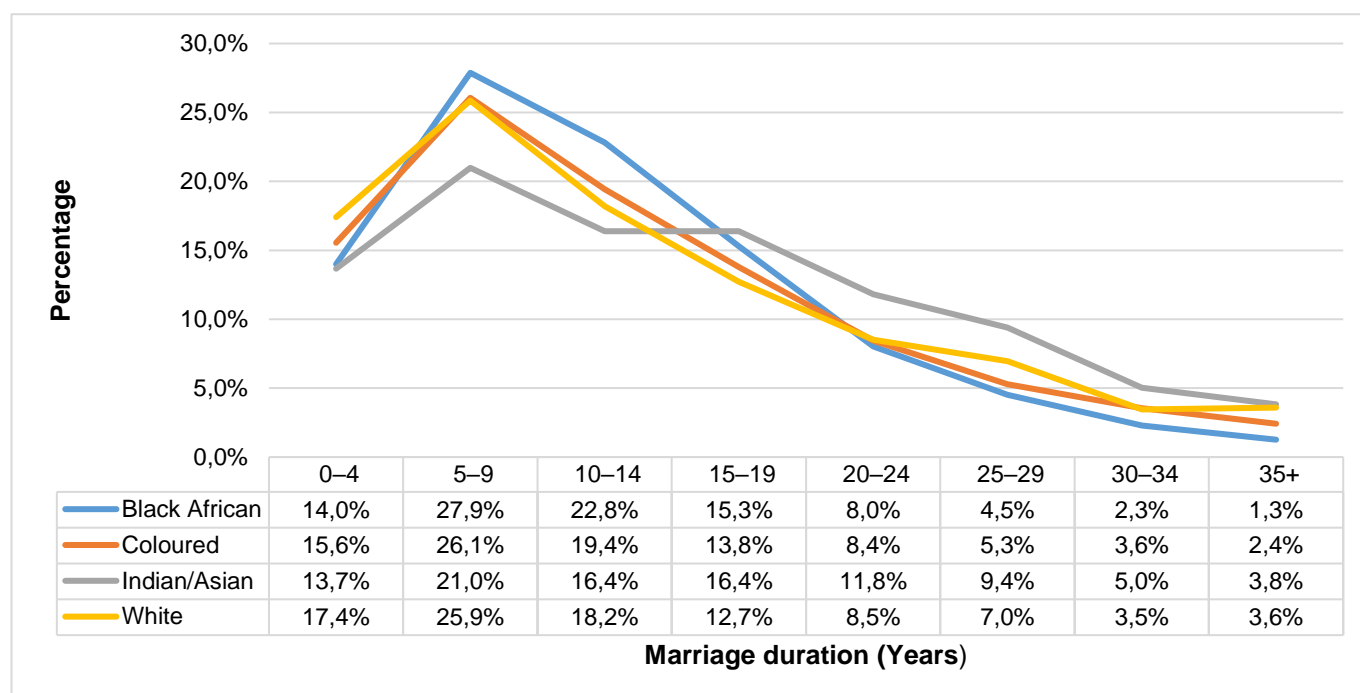
Statistics from the annual divorce data do not give a comprehensive picture of the number of marriages ending in divorce. However, there is data on the duration of marriages for divorces granted in 2023. Table 13 and Table 14 below show that the largest number [5 961 (26,8%)] of divorces were for marriages that lasted between five and nine years. This group is followed by marriages that lasted between 10 and 14 years [4 682 (21,1%)] and marriages that lasted for less than five years [3 365 (15,1%)]. Results further show that four in ten divorces 9 326 (42,0%) of the 22 230 in 2023 were from marriages that lasted for less than 10 years.

Table 13 – Number of divorces by age group and duration of marriage (male divorcees), 2023

Age group of husband	Duration of marriage									
	Total	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+	Unspecified
Total	22 230	3 365	5 961	4 682	3 227	1 830	1 176	626	447	916
<25	41	30	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
25-29	423	293	109	1	-	-	-	-	-	20
30-34	1 695	600	883	141	5	-	-	-	-	66
35-39	3 275	733	1 475	801	135	3	-	-	-	128
40-44	4 226	620	1 323	1 327	693	91	1	-	-	171
45-49	3 943	412	820	1 019	971	475	104	3	-	139
50-54	3 301	275	545	588	683	627	367	87	1	128
55-59	2 153	133	292	299	318	331	396	241	45	98
60-64	1 290	91	146	162	184	153	173	186	138	57
65-69	653	42	72	84	92	51	68	64	143	37
70-74	264	21	48	25	29	25	14	23	68	11
75-79	101	10	14	11	15	9	14	4	22	2
80+	45	5	5	5	4	10	6	1	7	2
Unspecified	820	100	227	219	98	55	33	17	23	48

Table 14 – Number of divorces by age group and duration of marriage (female divorcees), 2023

Age group of wife	Duration of marriage									
	Total	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+	Unspecified
Total	22 230	3 365	5 961	4 682	3 227	1 830	1 176	626	447	916
<25	132	114	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
25-29	1 031	529	424	31	1	-	-	-	-	46
30-34	2 989	815	1 543	508	24	-	-	-	-	99
35-39	4 278	683	1 569	1 366	468	21	-	-	-	171
40-44	4 495	480	1 045	1 307	1 121	326	26	-	-	190
45-49	3 405	307	534	661	806	688	263	20	-	126
50-54	2 491	176	326	328	415	437	477	205	10	117
55-59	1 353	83	158	151	143	182	238	234	93	71
60-64	754	33	75	82	84	76	99	117	160	28
65-69	303	19	31	33	33	23	18	32	101	13
70-74	115	10	14	8	11	10	11	-	48	3
75-79	35	5	2	1	2	5	6	4	8	2
80+	10	1	1	1	1	3	-	-	3	-
Unspecified	839	110	225	205	118	59	38	14	24	46

Figure 20 – The proportions of divorces by duration of marriage and population group, 2023

Population group variations show that 27,9% of divorces from the black African; 26,1% from coloured, 25,9% from white and 21,0% from Indian/Asian population groups were from marriages that lasted between five and nine years as indicated on Figure 20 above. The white population had the highest proportion (17,4%) of divorces that occurred in the first four years. The proportion of divorces in all population groups declined as the duration of marriage increased, with a significant decline being observed after 14 years of marriage. The proportion of divorces from the Indian/Asian population group is higher (16,4%) than the other population groups for marriages that did not last for 15 years and more.

3.7 Divorces involving couples with children less than 18 years

In 2023, 12 248 (55,1%) of the 22 230 divorces had children younger than 18 years whereas 9 982 (44,9%) divorces had no children, see Table 15 below. The profile of white divorcees show that 56,0% were without children. Looking at the black African and coloured divorcees, divorces involving couples with children constituted about 59,9% and 56,2% respectively.

Table 15 – Number and percentage distribution of divorces by population group and divorces with and without children (aged below 18 years), 2023

Population group	Total	Divorces with children	Divorces without children	Total	Divorces with children	Divorces without children
Total	22 230	12 248	9 982	100,0	55,1	44,9
Black African	12 362	7 401	4 961	100,0	59,9	40,1
Coloured	3 350	1 883	1 467	100,0	56,2	43,8
Indian/Asian	915	442	473	100,0	48,3	51,7
White	4 343	1 912	2 431	100,0	44,0	56,0
Mixed	672	335	337	100,0	49,9	50,1
Unspecified	588	275	313	100,0	46,8	53,2

Table 16 – Number and percentage distribution of children (aged below 18 years) affected by divorces by population group, 2023

Population group	Total number of children involved	%
Total	20 687	100,0
Black African	12 710	61,4
Coloured	3 256	15,7
Indian/Asian	656	3,2
White	3 048	14,7
Mixed	551	2,7
Unspecified	466	2,3

Table 16 above shows that about 20 687 children less than 18 years were affected by divorces that took place in 2023. The table further indicates that 61,4% of children affected by divorce were from the black African population group; 15,7% from the coloured population group; 14,7% from the white population group and 3,2% from the Indian/Asian population group.

4. Summary and concluding remarks

This statistical release provides information on civil and customary marriages, civil unions and divorces for 2023, based on data from the South African national marriage registration systems of the DHA and data of divorces granted by the DoJ&CD and OCJ.

A total of 105 123 marriages and unions were registered in 2023, these were constituted by 99 289 civil marriages, 3 537 customary marriages and 2 297 civil unions. Civil marriages registered indicate that more than half, 56 028 (56,4%) were solemnised by DHA marriage officers. The highest number of civil marriages was registered in Gauteng (26 054), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (15 967) and Western Cape (15 240), while the lowest was registered in Northern Cape (2 956). The majority of civil marriages in 2023 for both bridegrooms (79 693) and brides (84 571) were first time marriages, with women generally entering marriage at younger ages than men.

The number of registered customary marriages was 3 537 in 2023, which decreased by 19,2% from a total of 4 376 recorded in 2022. The majority of bridegrooms [3 079 (87,1%)] were older than their brides, with the gap in median ages at registration of customary marriage much wider than for other types of marriages. Over quarter of customary marriages in 2023 were registered in Limpopo 942 (26,6%) and KwaZulu-Natal had 789 (22,3%). Out of 2 297 civil unions registered in 2023, most unions were registered in Gauteng (961) and Western Cape (661) and lowest in Limpopo (28) and Northern Cape (26).

With regard to divorces, the data showed that 22 230 divorces were granted in 2023. Divorces were mainly from people who had married for the first time. There were more wives than husbands who filed for divorce, with husbands generally getting divorced at a later age than wives. The provincial distribution showed that Gauteng (6 110), Western Cape (3 730) and KwaZulu-Natal (3 532) were the provinces with the highest number of divorces granted. In 2023, about 20 687 children aged less than 18 years were affected by divorces that took place.

Overall, the information provided in this release showed a decreasing trend in the number of registered civil marriages, fluctuations on customary marriages and an increasing trend on civil unions except in 2020 and 2023. The number of divorces granted showed an increase from 2014 to 2017; decreased between 2018 and 2020 and an increase between 2021 and 2023. Areas of improvement in the quality of data were noted, particularly relating to completeness of information pertaining to unspecified province of registration, way of solemnisation and marital status at time of marriage for the data on marriages and civil unions; and unspecified population group and occupation of the divorcees.

ANNEXURES

Annexure A – Number of civil marriages by ages of bridegrooms and brides and marital status at the time of marriage, 2023

Grand Total	Bridegroom					Bride				
	Total	Never Married	Divorcee	Widower	Unspecified	Total	Never Married	Divorcee	Widow	Unspecified
	99 289	79 693	4 258	522	14 816	99 289	84 571	2 769	378	11 571
<18	4	3	1	-	-	42	40	2	-	-
18	12	12	-	-	-	98	93	2	2	1
19	55	54	-	1	-	247	233	3	11	-
18-19	67	66	-	1	-	345	326	5	13	1
20	88	88	-	-	-	489	471	5	10	3
21	215	210	1	4	-	812	794	6	11	1
22	461	454	-	5	2	1 314	1 285	8	15	6
23	870	864	-	3	3	2 100	2 061	10	21	8
24	1 364	1 357	-	6	1	2 733	2 698	5	16	14
20-24	2 998	2 973	1	18	6	7 448	7 309	34	73	32
25	2 027	2 015	2	7	3	3 317	3 277	6	19	15
26	2 370	2 352	-	12	6	3 911	3 849	8	15	39
27	2 789	2 765	2	8	14	4 240	4 174	9	11	46
28	3 189	3 141	3	22	23	4 511	4 408	6	19	78
29	3 507	3 441	2	7	57	4 685	4 541	10	12	122
25-29	13 882	13 714	9	56	103	20 664	20 249	39	76	300
30	3 674	3 581	2	15	76	4 668	4 493	8	9	158
31	3 714	3 617	5	4	88	4 748	4 538	21	6	183
32	3 754	3 634	6	8	106	4 528	4 273	19	8	228
33	3 802	3 598	11	10	183	4 317	3 961	36	6	314
34	3 730	3 506	10	5	209	4 149	3 835	21	-	293
30-34	18 674	17 936	34	42	662	22 410	21 100	105	29	1 176

Annexure A – Number of civil marriages by ages of bridegrooms and brides and marital status at the time of marriage, 2023 (continued)

Grand Total	Bridegroom					Bride				
	Total	Never Married	Divorcee	Widower	Unspecified	Total	Never Married	Divorcee	Widow	Unspecified
	99 289	79 693	4 258	522	14 816	99 289	84 571	2 769	378	11 571
35	3 619	3 381	14	3	221	3 843	3 435	41	7	360
36	3 642	3 357	17	4	264	3 700	3 296	27	6	371
37	3 561	3 199	22	4	336	3 577	3 142	57	3	375
38	3 625	3 218	29	3	375	3 441	2 949	46	1	445
39	3 409	2 967	30	3	409	3 113	2 637	58	2	416
35-39	17 856	16 122	112	17	1 605	17 674	15 459	229	19	1 967
40	3 477	2 951	40	3	483	2 925	2 376	62	3	484
41	3 422	2 860	52	5	505	2 701	2 159	78	-	464
42	2 910	2 372	51	1	486	2 365	1 804	73	1	487
43	2 771	2 219	44	1	507	2 156	1 640	80	3	433
44	2 570	2 016	58	-	496	1 972	1 463	64	-	445
40-44	15 150	12 418	245	10	2 477	12 119	9 442	357	7	2 313
45	2 306	1 776	74	3	453	1 681	1 201	74	-	406
46	2 258	1 617	73	-	568	1 659	1 171	66	-	422
47	2 125	1 476	87	-	562	1 510	1 029	83	-	398
48	2 076	1 434	86	1	555	1 465	969	83	-	413
49	1 938	1 251	100		587	1 395	897	109	-	389
45-49	10 703	7 554	420	4	2 725	7 710	5 267	415	-	2 028
50	1 794	1 112	112	1	569	1 201	719	96	-	386
51	1 801	1 075	148	-	578	1 168	707	92	-	369
52	1 398	697	112	-	589	939	504	98	-	337
53	1 497	784	145	-	568	930	502	105	-	323
54	1 250	618	138	-	494	824	418	73	2	331
50-54	7 740	4 286	655	1	2 798	5 062	2 850	464	2	1 746

Annexure A – Number of civil marriages by ages of bridegrooms and brides and marital status at the time of marriage, 2023 (concluded)

Grand Total	Bridegroom					Bride				
	Total	Never Married	Divorcee	Widower	Unspecified	Total	Never Married	Divorcee	Widow	Unspecified
	99 289	79 693	4 258	522	14 816	99 289	84 571	2 769	378	11 571
55	1 311	622	151	7	531	787	414	87	4	282
56	1 099	458	152	9	480	539	246	69	2	222
57	970	382	151	22	415	579	261	78	4	236
58	950	400	145	22	383	511	276	66	7	162
59	922	374	169	26	353	465	240	57	9	159
55-59	5 252	2 236	768	86	2 162	2 881	1 437	357	26	1 061
60	933	383	172	22	356	440	210	69	17	144
61	717	287	140	25	265	370	152	74	20	124
62	631	207	142	27	255	282	117	56	9	100
63	635	264	140	24	207	274	120	52	9	93
64	532	173	142	25	192	219	76	50	16	77
60-64	3 448	1 314	736	123	1 275	1 585	675	301	71	538
65	560	191	145	38	186	234	76	60	10	88
66	391	121	110	17	143	195	66	59	10	60
67	361	110	122	13	116	148	44	52	2	50
68	297	84	95	12	106	126	43	37	4	42
69	277	69	107	13	88	123	33	48	9	33
65-69	1 886	575	579	93	639	826	262	256	35	273
70+	1 629	496	698	71	364	523	155	205	27	136

Annexure B – Number of customary marriages by ages of bridegrooms and brides at the time of marriage, 2023

Age	Bridegroom	Bride
Total	3 537	3 537
<18	17	230
18	7	117
19	13	104
18-19	20	221
20	38	109
21	61	121
22	70	131
23	94	115
24	90	137
20-24	353	613
25	124	143
26	121	140
27	128	150
28	123	147
29	137	125
25-29	633	705
30	122	134
31	143	122
32	135	124
33	141	119
34	122	109
30-34	663	608

Annexure B – Number of customary marriages by ages of bridegrooms and brides at the time of marriage, 2023 (continued)

Age	Bridegroom	Bride
35	107	119
36	125	89
37	125	104
38	91	92
39	115	57
35-39	563	461
40	112	76
41	89	63
42	86	65
43	75	54
44	83	49
40-44	445	307
45	85	39
46	59	35
47	57	31
48	47	36
49	53	37
45-49	301	178
50	52	28
51	37	21
52	38	28
53	39	20
54	36	10
50-54	202	107

Annexure B – Number of customary marriages by ages of bridegrooms and brides at the time of marriage, 2023 (concluded)

Age	Bridegroom	Bride
55	35	14
56	26	11
57	32	15
58	24	13
59	27	5
55-59	144	58
60	24	9
61	31	5
62	24	3
63	14	4
64	21	3
60-64	114	24
65	13	3
66	15	3
67	9	2
68	8	2
69	5	-
65-69	50	10
70+	30	7
Unspecified	2	8

Annexure C – Distribution of bridegrooms/ men of customary marriages by birth age group and year of marriage occurrence age group

Age group	Year of marriage occurrence								Grand Total
	1944–1953	1954–1963	1964–1973	1974–1983	1984–1993	1994–2003	2004–2013	2014–2023	
<18	2	5	2	4	2	-	2	-	17
18–19	1	5	3	9	1	-	-	1	20
20–24	2	12	60	143	84	22	21	9	353
25–29	1	12	50	146	188	72	73	91	633
30–34	-	7	31	60	101	93	124	247	663
35–39	-	3	8	25	45	62	136	284	563
40–44	-	1	4	19	31	40	105	245	445
45–49	-	1	1	6	13	25	75	180	301
50–55	-	-	-	2	4	12	47	137	202
55–59	-	-	-	1	7	4	13	119	144
60–64	-	-	2	3	1	3	16	89	114
65–69	-	-	-	-	3	1	5	41	50
70+	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	29	30
Unspecified	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Grand Total	7	46	162	418	480	335	617	1 472	3 537

Annexure D – Distribution of brides/ women of customary marriages by birth age group and year of marriage occurrence age group

Age group	Year of marriage occurrence								Grand Total
	1944–1953	1954–1963	1964–1973	1974–1983	1984–1993	1994–2003	2004–2013	2014–2023	
<18	4	7	41	107	54	9	8	-	230
18–19	1	8	32	86	63	19	10	2	221
20–24	2	19	52	126	171	73	88	82	613
25–29	-	8	23	66	107	100	145	256	705
30–34	-	3	9	15	47	73	142	319	608
35–39	-	1	3	11	22	32	114	278	461
40–44	-	-	1	5	6	21	59	215	307
45–49	-	-	-	1	4	3	31	139	178
50–54	-	-	-	1	5	3	14	84	107
55–59	-	-	-	-	1	1	5	51	58
60–64	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	23	24
65–69	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	9	10
70+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7
Unspecified	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	7	8
Grand Total	7	46	162	418	480	335	617	1 472	3 537

Annexure E – Number of civil unions by ages of spouses-1 and spouses-2 at the time of civil union, 2023

Age	Spouses-1	Spouses-2
Total	2 297	2 297
18	-	2
19	2	2
18-19	2	4
20	4	9
21	3	5
22	14	23
23	13	47
24	33	59
20-24	67	143
25	40	72
26	69	87
27	85	125
28	100	123
29	105	130
25-29	399	537
30	115	124
31	149	116
32	113	121
33	134	119
34	98	119
30-34	609	599

Annexure E – Number of civil unions by ages of spouses-1 and spouses-2 at the time of civil union, 2023 (continued)

Age	Spouses-1	Spouses-2
35	83	93
36	122	93
37	92	91
38	86	63
39	76	67
35-39	459	407
40	69	58
41	58	49
42	65	34
43	43	38
44	17	28
40-44	252	207
45	35	42
46	34	34
47	29	19
48	34	26
49	41	22
45-49	173	143
50	34	28
51	26	25
52	31	23
53	30	23
54	16	25
50-54	137	124

Annexure E – Number of civil unions by ages of spouses-1 and spouses-2 at the time of civil union, 2023 (concluded)

Age	Spouses-1	Spouses-2
55	27	10
56	18	16
57	14	21
58	18	11
59	13	6
55-59	90	64
60	8	12
61	10	7
62	13	6
63	6	5
64	12	2
60-64	49	32
65	7	4
66	7	3
67	6	3
68	1	4
69	8	2
65-69	29	16
70+	31	21

Annexure F – Number of divorces by age and population group (male divorcees), 2023

Age group	Population group						
	Total	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Other	Unspecified
Total	22 230	12 682	3 569	1 065	4 513	48	353
<25	41	10	7	7	15	-	2
25-29	423	84	128	29	171	1	10
30-34	1 695	673	417	110	474	1	20
35-39	3 275	1 778	620	183	643	3	48
40-44	4 226	2 550	664	210	731	5	66
45-49	3 943	2 482	570	193	653	7	38
50-54	3 301	1 986	484	117	662	4	48
55-59	2 153	1 302	285	71	455	3	37
60-64	1 290	775	174	46	280	-	15
65-69	653	374	91	18	163	-	7
70-74	264	122	28	8	100	-	6
75-79	101	42	15	4	39	-	1
80+	45	19	7	2	14	-	3
Unspecified	820	485	79	67	113	24	52

Annexure G – Number of divorces by age group and population group (female divorcees), 2023

Age group	Population group						
	Total	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Other	Unspecified
Total	22 230	12 629	3 666	1 008	4 481	12	434
<25	132	38	20	8	62	-	4
25-29	1 031	378	234	62	344	1	12
30-34	2 989	1 602	577	157	611	-	42
35-39	4 278	2 655	702	162	692	-	67
40-44	4 495	2 800	706	215	697	1	76
45-49	3 405	2 063	509	151	618	-	64
50-54	2 491	1 404	375	101	557	-	54
55-59	1 353	705	227	60	328	2	31
60-64	754	353	145	31	214	-	11
65-69	303	123	56	11	111	-	2
70-74	115	28	21	4	59	-	3
75-79	35	9	11	-	14	-	1
80+	10	5	1	-	4	-	-
Unspecified	839	466	82	46	170	8	67

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. Purpose of the statistical release

The purpose of this statistical release is to provide information on marriages, unions and divorces recorded in South Africa in 2023. The data on marriages and unions was gathered from the DHA while information for divorces came from the DoJ&CD and OCJ through divorce courts, based on the number of divorce forms that had reached Stats SA.

2. Scope and coverage

The data on marriages currently cover registered civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions in South Africa. The divorce data cover cases for filed divorces from registered marriages and unions that had been granted; and forms on them received by Stats SA. Undocumented cases of abandonment or divorces that had been granted by religious or traditional authorities are not reported in the release.

3. Data sources

Stats SA obtains data on civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions directly from the DHA head office. Data on divorces are collected from divorce courts using a standard structured questionnaire (Divorce Forms) prepared by Stats SA. The 2023 data came from both the old and the revised Divorce Forms since some of the courts have not switched to the revised form. The questionnaires are regularly completed by the courts as divorce decrees are granted. In 2023, Stats SA received and processed 22 230 divorce forms.

4. Limitations

Due to the few variables collected on married couples and divorcees, background information on couples and divorcees is limited. Therefore, the release focuses on presenting the demographic characteristics of the married and divorced persons.

5. Definitions of terms

Civil marriages: these are marriages registered according to the Marriage Act, 1961 (Act No. 25 of 1961). In the release, the term 'civil' is used to differentiate marriages that were solemnised by licensed DHA marriage officers from marriages that were solemnised by religious marriage officers.

Customary marriages: these are marriages that are negotiated, celebrated or concluded according to any of the systems of indigenous African customary law which exists in South Africa as prescribed in the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, 1998 (Act No. 120 of 1998).

Civil unions: refers to the voluntary union of two persons who are both 18 years of age or older, which is solemnised and registered by way of either a marriage or a civil partnership, in accordance with the procedures prescribed in the Civil Union Act, 2006 (Act No. 17 of 2006). Spouse-1 and Spouse-2 are used because the data does not specify the sex of the spouse.

Crude Marriage Rate: the crude marriage rate indicates the ratio of the number of marriages in a specific year to the mid-year population in that year. It is expressed as marriages per 1 000 population.

Crude Divorce Rate: the crude divorce rate indicates the ratio of the number of divorces in a specific year to the mid-year population in that year. It is expressed as divorces per 100 000 population.

Mixed population group: refers to couples with different population groups.

Occupation: occupation is coded using the *Standard Classification of Occupations*, Report No 09-90-01, First Edition, 1986 published by Stats SA.

Plaintiff: spouse(s) who filed the divorce case.

Unknown province of registration: the information about the name of placename is not known, as the province is derived from the provided placename.

Unspecified province of registration: the information about the name of the placename is not specified (missing), as the province is derived from the provided placename.

6. Symbols

- = Nil
- < = Less than
- ≥ = Greater than or equal to sign

7. References

Bongaarts, J. (1978) A Framework for Analyzing the Proximate Determinants of Fertility. *Population and Development Review*, 4(1), pp. 105-132.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Marriages and divorces, 2023

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