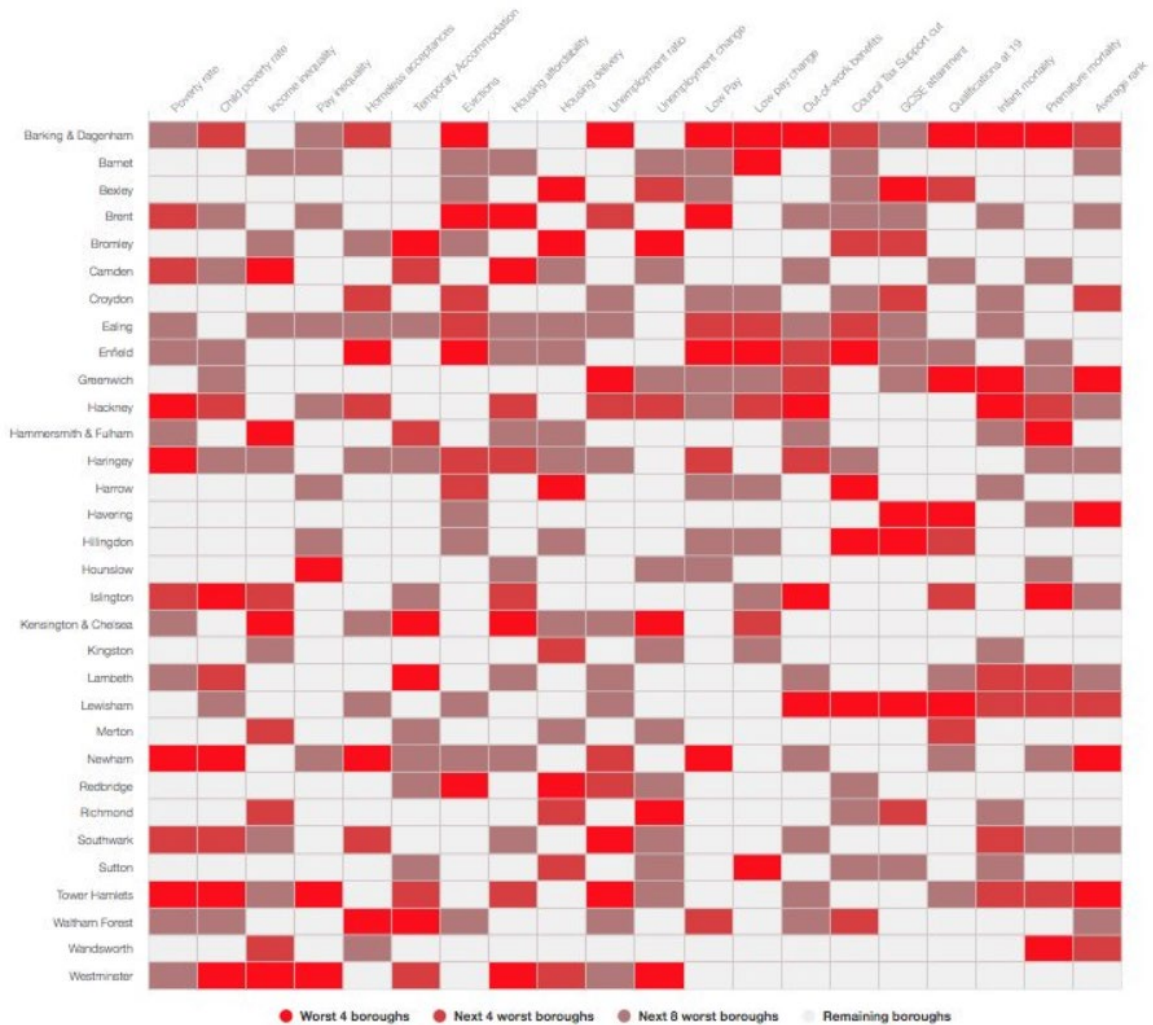


# Demography



# Additional Reading Booklet

# First same-sex marriage takes place in Northern Ireland



## Belfast couple Robyn Peoples and Sharni Edwards make history after law change

PA Media, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020, The Guardian

A Belfast couple have tied the knot in the first same-sex marriage to take place in Northern Ireland.

Robyn Peoples, 26, and Sharni Edwards, 27, made history at a ceremony in a hotel in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, on Tuesday afternoon. Their marriage came after a law change in the region.

The day marks their sixth anniversary as a couple and they had booked a civil partnership ceremony at the Loughshore hotel months before the legislation was passed last summer. When it became clear the first marriages could take place in Northern Ireland this week, they changed their ceremony to a wedding.

After a long and high-profile campaign for change, same-sex marriage was legalised at Westminster by MPs who stepped in and acted on the issue during the power-sharing impasse at Stormont.

Edwards said "it means the absolute world" to be married, before thanking the activists who have campaigned for same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland.

"If it wasn't for them guys we wouldn't be sat here right now. We just want to say thank you to everyone ... everyone who has marched and signed petitions, everyone who has helped us get to this stage, we just want to say thank you. We didn't expect to be the first couple, it's coincidental. Today is our six-year anniversary

so we wanted to go ahead with a civil partnership but when the bill was passed it was perfect timing and it was a complete coincidence, a happy coincidence. We couldn't be more grateful."

Peoples said: "For Northern Ireland, we need to be the face of the people to show everyone it's OK. We fought so long and hard for this opportunity to be seen as equal and now we are here and it's just amazing."

Edwards, a waitress from Brighton who did not know the law was different in Northern Ireland until she moved from England to Belfast, said: "We feel humbled that our wedding is a landmark moment for equal rights in Northern Ireland. We didn't set out to make history – we just fell in love."

"We are so grateful to the thousands of people who marched for our freedoms, to the Love Equality campaign who led the way, and the politicians who voted to change the law. Without you, our wedding wouldn't have been possible. We will be forever thankful."

# New immigration rules: where will UK find its drivers and pickers?



## **Bosses and unions warn of staff shortages, from logistics to food and hospitality to health and social care**

Phillip Inman & Gwyn Topham, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020, The Guardian

Business groups warned that major industries would face a shortage of vital workers after the government outlined its new points-based immigration system to limit the number of low-skilled workers coming to the UK.

Unions said the care system would be “on its knees” should the policy be introduced without further reductions in the minimum salary, which ministers set at £25,600 unless migrants can show they have a job offer in a “shortage occupation” or have a relevant PhD.

Adam Marshall, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said the application process needed to be “radically simplified” if small and medium-sized businesses were to navigate the system.

The Institute of Directors said it was concerned the UK’s “economic dynamism” would be harmed while the CBI said the system would need to be flexible to keep pace with changes in the job market.

Businesses including transport and warehousing, food processing and tourism warned the rules would have a drastic impact on businesses and trade. Beverly Dixon, of G’s Fresh, a Cambridgeshire farming business that sells more than a billion packs of salad and vegetable crops to major UK supermarkets each year, said the firm could now face severe staff shortages next year.

G's could face a shortage of around 1,000 pickers for the 2021 harvest, she said, adding: "The immigration policy-points based system is unlikely to include workers at the skill level that the government categorise our roles as – which is low skilled. The English language level would also be a concern."

The Freight Transport Association said it would exacerbate an existing shortage of HGV drivers, whose average salary is above the threshold but who are classified as level 2 or unskilled workers. Around 13% of HGV drivers are currently recruited from the EU, and the FTA said a further 59,000 drivers were needed. Warehousing would also be affected, with forklift truck and van drivers in particularly short supply.

Sally Gilson, head of skills at the FTA, said: "I don't understand why they are setting an arbitrary level for skills and salary when it should surely be based on what the country needs. These are jobs that Britain relies on to keep goods and trade moving. "Logistics hubs are in areas of low unemployment, so it's not a case of being able to train up local people to take those roles."

Nick Allen, chief executive of the British Meat Processors Association, said the industry was "deeply concerned". He said that 60%-70% of workers in meat plants were non-UK labour, who typically come and work for two to three years, and they would be blocked by the new proposals.

"They quickly get trained and go above that salary cap. Our concern is getting access to that sort of person ... We struggle to get that on the home market. The only option will be slowing down how many animals we can take in, it will disrupt the whole supply chain from farm gate to consumer – costs for farmers, and shortages of food on the shelves."

The travel industry association Abta said that immigration was crucial to ensure the workforce it needed, with the number of non-UK nationals working in travel and tourism nearly a third higher than the UK average.

He warned that up to 15,000 UK employees working abroad could also lose their jobs if reciprocal protections with the EU were jettisoned, adding extra burdens on travel businesses. "Travel reps and other vital support staff are posted abroad to provide valuable services to UK travellers in EU destinations. The [Posted Workers] directive also allows EU staff to support tourists visiting the UK."

The government said businesses should consider increasing levels of pay and invest in automation to reduce their reliance on foreign workers.

The UK Homecare Association said care firms would be dismayed by the new policy. "Cutting off the supply of prospective care workers will pave the way for more people waiting unnecessarily in hospital or going without care. Telling employers to adjust, in a grossly underfunded care system, is simply irresponsible."

He added: "Scapegoating migrants and playing to the gallery may get some cheap headlines, but it's wrong and put whole sectors – such as social care and food, not to mention the NHS – at risk."

# Divorce rate falls for heterosexual couples in England and Wales



## Applications backlog partly blamed for drop to lowest level in 50 years, while same-sex couple figure rises

Owen Bowcott, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2019, The Guardian

The divorce rate for opposite sex couples in England and Wales has plunged to its lowest level for almost half a century – partly due to problems in processing applications.

There were 90,871 divorces of heterosexual partners in 2018 – a drop of 10.6% compared with the previous year and the lowest number since 1971, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The divorce rate fell to 7.5 per 1,000 married men and women from 8.4 in the previous year. Divorcing couples were married for an average of 12-and-a-half years, according to the figures.

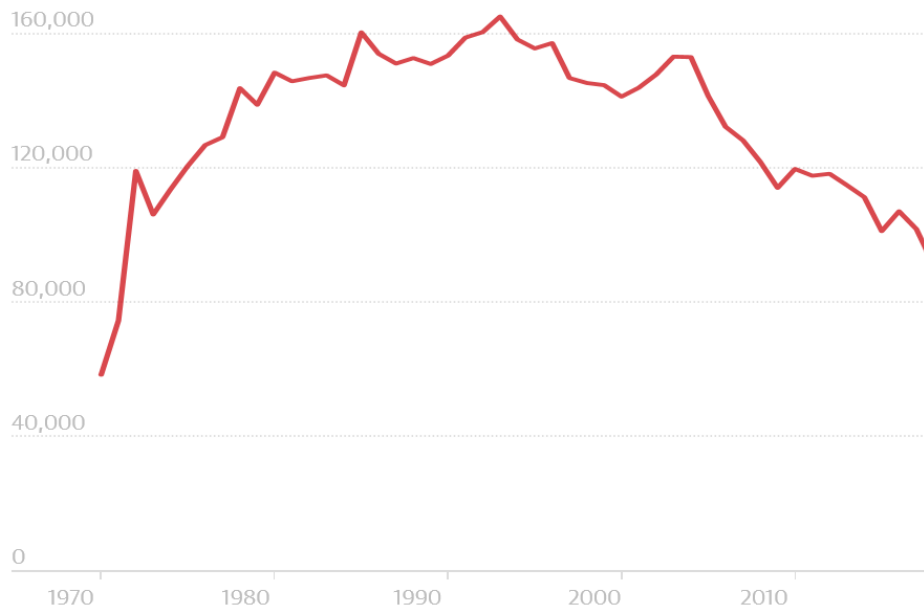
The drop “partly reflects the overall trend seen in recent years”, the ONS said, but was also more pronounced because 8% more divorce petitions were processed last year as a backlog of cases from 2017 were dealt with.

The main reason for the long-term decline in divorce is the lower rate of marriage as more couples opt to cohabit without going through a wedding ceremony.

The number of divorces among same-sex couples, however, increased by more than a quarter last year, rising from 338 in 2017 to 428 in 2018.

Unreasonable behaviour, which can include infidelity, was cited as the most common reason in all divorces last year. Some 51.9% of wives and 36.8% of husbands petitioned for divorce on these grounds.

### **Divorces of heterosexual partners fell to 90,871 in 2018 - the lowest number in nearly 50 years**



Guardian graphic. Source: ONS

Under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 in England and Wales, anyone seeking a divorce must either prove their partner is at fault through adultery, desertion or unreasonable behaviour, or if both sides agree, they can part after two years of separation. In the absence of consent or evidence of fault, applicants must wait until they have been living apart for five years.

The government has repeatedly promised to introduce “no fault” divorce through legislation. The divorce, dissolution and separation bill made its way through several stages in the Commons and Lords earlier this year but was lost when parliament was dissolved in the autumn.

Of splits among sex-sex couples, three-quarters (75%) were among lesbian partners – a similar proportion to the previous year. Divorces among same-sex couples have been recorded since marriage laws changed in 2014.

The ONS said: “Divorces among same-sex couples were first recorded in 2015 and annual increases have been seen each year since then, reflecting growth in the size of the same-sex married population in England and Wales.”

The figures are calculated using information from courts during divorce proceedings and also look at annulments.

They do not include married couples who separate but do not divorce or dissolutions of civil partnerships, which are recorded in different data.

Commenting on the latest figures, Joanna Farrands, a family specialist at the law firm Barlow Robbins, said: "Behaviour continues to be the most used fact for proving a marriage has irretrievably broken down, no doubt because if you wish to proceed with a divorce immediately you must cite either behaviour or adultery. This once again emphasises the need to reform the law as so many couples are forced to raise behaviours at the outset when it may be a mutual decision to end the divorce. No-fault divorce could not come soon enough.

"The reduction in divorces mirrors the reduction in marriages and the significant increase in cohabiting couples. Cohabiting couples have no protection on the breakdown of the relationship. The myth of the 'common-law spouse' remains in society at large."

#### **Sources:**

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<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/18/new-immigration-rules-where-will-uk-find-its-drivers-and-pickers>

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/nov/29/divorce-rate-falls-for-heterosexual-couples-in-england-and-wales>

#### **Other recommended reads:**

<https://www.homecareinsight.co.uk/government-has-less-than-10-years-to-save-the-social-care-system/>

<https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/health/blackpool-has-lowest-disability-free-life-expectancy-england-1889305>