



Name of Country and Jurisdiction:

Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

- 1. What forms of legally recognized relationships are available?
- 2. What are the requirements to be able to enter into the above relationships?
- 3. Differences between marriage and civil unions and how the two sets of laws interact.
- 4. What kinds of pre-existing relationships make you ineligible to enter each kind of relationship?
- 5. When a couple comes to Northern Ireland, is their pre-existing relationship recognized? If not, is there any formalized avenue for obtaining recognition?
- 6. How can each form of relationship be dissolved? What is the residency requirement or other link to Northern Ireland for an authority to grant a divorce/dissolution?



1. What forms of legally recognized relationships are available?



LEGAL RECOGNITIONS FOR OPPOSITE-SEX COUPLE ¹	GEOGRAPHY	LEGISLATION	AVAILABLE TO SAME-SEX COUPLES
Marriage, registered	Northern Ireland	The Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003	No
Civil Partnership, registered	All of the UK	Civil Partnership Act 2004	Yes (only same-sex couples)

¹ It is possible for opposite-sex or same-sex individuals to live together as cohabitants. This relationship is generally not legally recognised by the State and cohabitants do not receive the same rights and benefits received by spouses or civil partners. Cohabitants may have certain rights under principles of equity and trusts law.



2. What are the requirements to be able to enter into the above relationships?

Example(s):

- (i) If a geographic link is required:



FORM OF LEGAL RELATIONSHIP	REQUIREMENTS
Marriage	<p>There is no legal residency requirement.</p> <p>A UK national living overseas can ordinarily marry their same sex partner at the UK consulate or embassy in that overseas territory if marriage is otherwise not possible in that overseas territory and if they nominate England, Wales or Scotland as their deemed place of marriage. The UK consulate or embassy will decline to conduct ceremonies if the local authorities object.</p>
Civil Partnership	<p>There is no legal residency requirement.</p> <p>A UK national living overseas can ordinarily enter into a civil partnership at the UK consulate or embassy in that overseas territory if a same-sex civil union is otherwise not possible in that overseas territory. The UK consulate or embassy will decline to conduct ceremonies if the local authorities object.</p>

- (ii) If other substantive eligibility criteria must be satisfied:

Different rules apply where one party intends to enter a legal relationship with another party who is not from the European Economic Area or Switzerland and where that party is subject to immigration control. In that case, both parties must go to a 'designated' register office where certain additional documents (in addition to those required below) such as a visa, an EEA family permit or a Marriage Visitor visa may be required depending on where the parties come from in order to enable such parties to enter that legal relationship.

Different rules also apply for individuals who are detained, house-bound, or UK nationals serving abroad, for example in the army, navy or air force, and who intend to enter into one of the legal relationships below.

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FORM OF LEGAL RELATIONSHIP	REQUIREMENTS
Opposite-sex religious marriage or civil marriage	<p>Both parties to the marriage must be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least 16 years of age on the day of their marriage (and if aged under 18 have the requisite permission from parents/guardians or authority from the court); • not related to each other in a way which would prevent their marrying; • free to marry (ie. single, divorced, dissolved or widowed); • not of the same sex as one another; and • capable of understanding the nature of a marriage ceremony and of consenting to marriage. <p>Each of the parties to a marriage intended to be solemnised in Northern Ireland must give the registrar 14 days' notice.</p> <p>In a religious marriage, the marriage may only be solemnised on the date, by the officiant and at the place specified in the marriage schedule. The parties must arrange for the marriage schedule to be delivered to the registrar within 3 days of the marriage.</p> <p>In a civil marriage, the person who solemnised the marriage shall cause it to be registered as soon as practicable. A couple must get married within twelve months of the day the notice of intent to marry was recorded.</p>
Civil partnership	<p>Eligibility criteria are the same as civil marriage, save that both parties must be of the same sex as one another.</p> <p>Each party must give at least 15 days' notice of its intention to enter a civil partnership.</p> <p>The civil partnership must take place after the notice period has elapsed and within 12 months of the day the notice was recorded.</p>

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3. If both marriage and civil unions exist in the country:

- (a) Identify any significant differences in eligibility; and
- (b) Briefly highlight how they interact if both are in effect (e.g., in some countries entering into a marriage with the same or a different person automatically dissolves any civil union that the two parties were previously party to making the latter vulnerable and potentially circumventing separation laws).
- (c) If both marriage and civil unions are available to same-sex couples, briefly highlight areas where major differences exist between marriage and civil unions (e.g., taxes, adoption, immigration, etc.).

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(a)	<p>Civil unions are not available to opposite-sex couples. Marriage is not available to same-sex couples.</p> <p>Unlike marriage, no religious organisation may hold a civil partnership. The civil partnership may not take place on religious premises and there must be no religious element to the partnership ceremony.</p>
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(b)	No person may enter into a civil partnership if they are already married (either to someone else, or to the person with whom they wished to enter into a civil partnership). No person may enter into a marriage if they are already in a civil partnership.
(c)	Not applicable.

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4. What kinds of pre-existing relationships make you ineligible to enter each kind of relationship?

A

Marriage	Two people are not eligible to enter into marriage if either of them is already lawfully married or already in a civil partnership with a person who is not one of the couple. In addition, two people cannot marry if they are already in a civil partnership.
Civil Partnership	Two people are not eligible to register as civil partners if either of them is already a civil partner or lawfully married. A civil partnership is only available to same-sex couples.

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5. When a couple comes to Northern Ireland, is their pre-existing relationship recognized? If not, is there any formalized avenue for obtaining recognition?

A

Marriage	<p>An opposite-sex marriage lawfully formed outside Northern Ireland is automatically recognised in Northern Ireland as a marriage. This includes polygamous marriages entered into on or after 1 August 1971. An exception applies in the case of polygamous marriages entered into overseas where either party was at the time of the marriage domiciled in the UK or any country whose law does not permit polygamous marriages.</p> <p>A same-sex marriage lawfully formed outside Northern Ireland is recognised as a civil partnership.</p>
Civil Partnership	<p>A civil partnership lawfully entered into in England, Wales or Scotland is automatically recognised in Northern Ireland as a civil partnership.</p> <p>Same-sex unions/partnerships lawfully entered into outside the UK (and which satisfy certain conditions) are categorised as overseas relationships and automatically recognised as civil partnerships in Northern Ireland.</p>



6. How can each form of relationship be dissolved? What is the residency requirement or other link to Northern Ireland for an authority to grant a divorce/dissolution?



Marriage	<p>A marriage can be brought to an end by divorce where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) one person has committed adultery (adultery can only occur where a partner has had sex with someone of the opposite sex); ii) the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent; iii) the respondent has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of at least two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition; iv) the parties to the marriage have lived apart for a continuous period of at least two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition and the respondent consents to a decree being granted; or v) the parties to the marriage have lived apart for a continuous period of at least five years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition. <p>A marriage can also be annulled where it is void (for example, because one partner was already married or in a civil partnership) or is voidable (for example, where the marriage has not been consummated (however, this does not apply to same-sex marriages).</p> <p>A presumption of death order will also bring a marriage to an end.</p> <p>As overseas same-sex marriage may also be ended in similar circumstances where the partners satisfy the same conditions for overseas civil partnerships (i.e. domiciled or habitually resident).</p> <p>A Court in Northern Ireland will recognise a judgment concerning the divorce, annulment or legal separation of partners in a marriage where made by a court of an EU Member State.</p>
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<p>Civil Partnership</p>	<p>A civil partnership can be dissolved, annulled or terminated on the grounds that it has broken down irretrievably, it is void or voidable, because one of the partners is presumed dead or due to legal separation of the partners. A civil partnership can also be brought to an end on the death of a civil partner.</p> <p>An overseas civil partnership is voidable if it is voidable in under the law of the country in which it was registered. Further, a Court order can be sought to declare that a dissolution, annulment or legal separation obtained outside Northern Ireland is recognised in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) both civil partners are habitually resident in the UK or were habitually resident, and one of the partners remains in the UK; b) the respondent (i.e. the civil partner who did not apply for dissolution, annulment or separation) is habitually resident in the UK or the petitioner (i.e. the civil partner applying for the dissolution, annulment or separation) is habitually resident in the UK and has resided there for at least one year immediately preceding the presentation of the petition; or c) the petitioner is domiciled and habitually resident in the UK and has resided there for at least six months immediately preceding the presentation of the petition, <p>a Court in Northern Ireland has jurisdiction to dissolve or annul or legally separate civil partners.</p> <p>A dissolution, annulment or legal separation effected by a court in England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland will be recognised throughout the United Kingdom.</p> <p>A Court in Northern Ireland will recognise a judgment concerning the dissolution, annulment or legal separation of partners in a civil partnership where made by a court of an EU Member State.</p>
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■ **Sources:**

The Marriage (Northern Ireland Order) 2003

Civil Partnership Act 2004