

4. GENERAL CONTEXT INDICATORS

4. Marriage and divorce

Definition and measurement

The crude marriage rate is the annual number of new marriages as a population ratio. The crude divorce rate is the annual number of marriages legally ended as a population ratio. Marriage and divorce statistics are based on administrative registers. Marriage rates disregard informal family formation as well as formation of other types of legal unions. Divorce rates miss separation of these unmeasured unions, as well as separation without divorce.

Marriage and divorce rates indicate flows into and out of the state of marriage. Information on the relationship status of the population stock is taken from the *European Social Survey 2006-07* for 17 OECD countries. Not only does it measure those living together and legally married, it measures the prevalence of civil partnerships which are a new feature on the social landscape in several OECD countries, as well as cohabiting couples. Additionally, the data include same-sex as well as opposite-sex couples cohabiting and in civil partnerships. There may be differences between this survey data and other sources of marital status for individual countries, due to sample variance and non-response bias.

Marriage rates have fallen in most OECD countries.

In 2006, the crude marriage rate averaged across 26 OECD countries was 5.1 per 1 000 people, more than a third less than in 1970. The pace of the decline in marriage rates differs across OECD countries. The post-1990 decline was sharp in the Czech Republic, Korea, and the United States while Spain and Sweden show stable or even rising rates since the late 1990s (GE4.1).

Divorce rates have risen in most OECD countries.

In 2005, the crude divorce rate was on average 2.3 per 1 000 people, twice the level recorded in 1970 and 0.2 points higher than in 2000. Post-1990, divorce rates fell in the United States but rose in Portugal, Poland, Spain and Japan (GE4.2).

Legal marriage is by far the most common form of adult relationship across the OECD, but significant numbers of the population cohabit or, in some countries, are in a civil partnership (Table GE4.3). More than 60% of the adult population are married in

Portugal and Switzerland, but only 44% in Sweden. Civil partnership, even where legally available, is much less popular than marriage, but it exceeds 5% of the adult population in Belgium (in fact there are more Belgians in civil partnership than are cohabiting), the Netherlands and Hungary. High rates of cohabitation are a feature of the Nordic countries, especially Sweden, and of France. Rates of cohabitation are especially low in the Slovak Republic, Hungary and Poland. France has the lowest proportion of singles at 28% and Poland the highest at 42%.

While men are typically older than women when they first get married, the age gap between men and women at the time of first marriage exhibits divergent patterns between countries. The male-female age difference in the age at first marriage has increased in Luxembourg and Austria between 1990 and 2003 (GE4.4). By contrast, the postponement in women's age at first marriage has been accompanied by a large decrease in the male-female age gap in Ireland.

Further reading

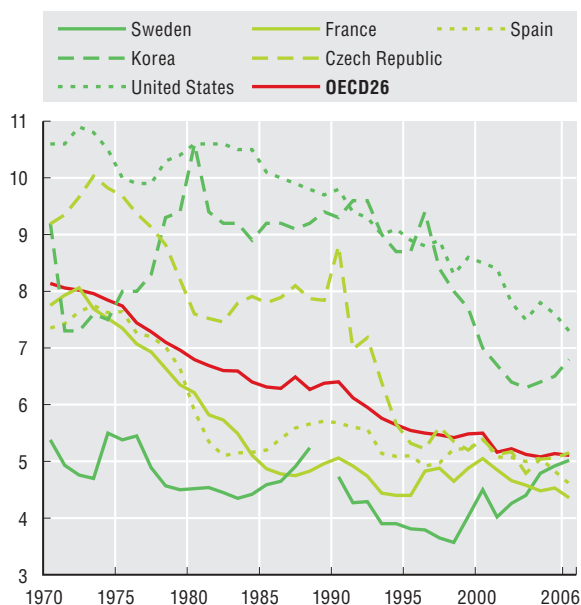
- Dickmann, A. and K. Schmidheiny (2006), "The Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce – A Fifteen-Country Study with the Fertility and Family Survey", Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America.
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Table note

Table GE4.3: There was no data for Austria in categories other than married. Missing civil partnership data indicate the lack of this relationship form.

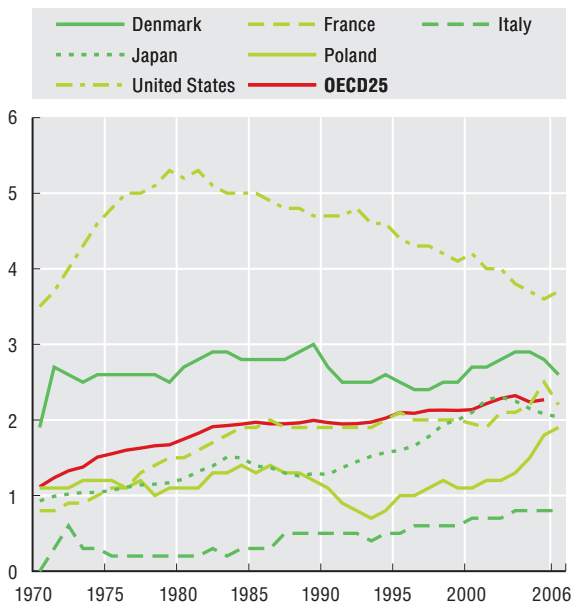
GE4.1. Marriage rates are generally declining

Marriages per 1 000 population, 1970-2006



GE4.2. Divorce rates are generally rising

Divorces per 1 000 population, 1970-2006



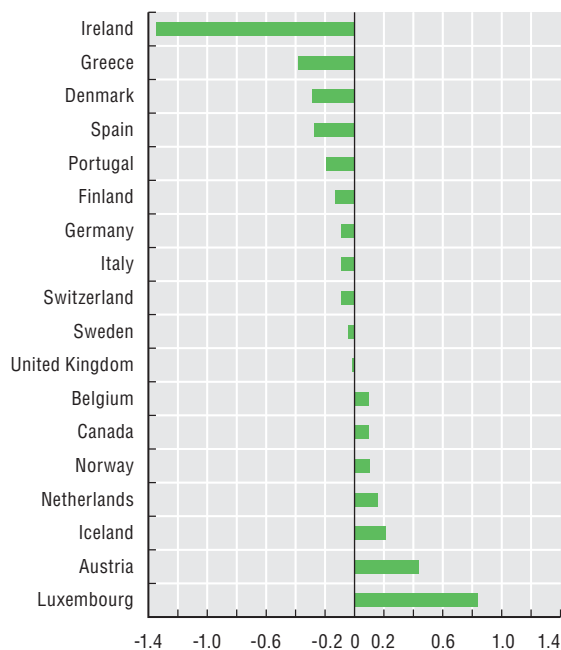
GE4.3. Marriage, civil partnership and cohabitation

Percentages of adult population, 2006-07

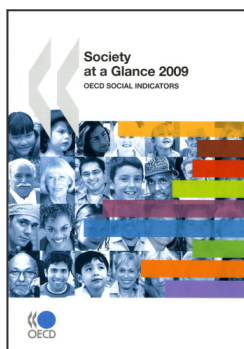
	Married	Civil partnership	Cohabitants	Singles	Total
Austria	52
Belgium	54	7	6	34	100
Denmark	57	1	13	30	100
Finland	51	0	15	34	100
France	56	2	14	28	100
Germany	54	1	8	36	100
Hungary	53	6	3	37	100
Ireland	55	0	7	37	100
Netherlands	56	6	8	30	100
Norway	50	3	14	33	100
Poland	56	0	2	42	100
Portugal	62	0	4	34	100
Slovak Rep.	56	5	1	39	100
Spain	55	3	4	38	100
Sweden	44	1	21	35	100
Switzerland	61	2	6	31	100
United Kingdom	54	4	6	36	100
OECD	54	3	8	35	100

GE4.4. Changing male-female age gaps at first marriage

Change from 1990 to 2003 in the difference in mean age at first marriage between men and women



Source: Figures GE4.1, GE4.2, GE4.4 based on Eurostat and national sources; GE4.3 based on European Social Survey 2006-07.



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