

SF3.1: Marriage and divorce rates

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on marriages through three measures:

- The crude marriage rate (CMR), defined as the number of marriages during a given year per 1000 people
- The mean age at first marriage, defined as the mean age in years of marrying persons at the time of marriage. This measure is disaggregated by sex with separate averages for men and women
- The distribution of marrying persons by previous marital status, or the proportion of all marrying people with known previous marital status who were previously 'single never married', 'divorced', or 'widowed'
- The share of same-sex marriages among all marriages during a given year.

Divorce is captured by one measure:

- The crude divorce rate (CDR), defined as the number of divorces during a given year per 1000 people.

Key findings

Marriage rates differ considerably across OECD countries (Chart SF3.1.A). In some countries (including Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain) crude marriage rates (CMRs) are very low in 2020 at fewer than 2 marriages per 1000 people. In others (such as Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Turkey), rates are almost three as high at around 6 per 1000. In most OECD countries, the CMR is somewhere between 2.5 and 5 marriages per 1000, with the OECD average standing at 3.7.

Restrictions put in place during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic including social distancing requirements, size limits on gatherings and travel restrictions had a direct impact on marriage-rates in 2020 in most countries. On average across 32 OECD countries for which data are available, marriage rates declined by 20% in 2020. They declined most, by around 50%, in Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain; by around one-third in Australia and France, and, by only around 10% in Germany, Japan and Korea. Marriage rates declined in all OECD and EU countries except in Hungary (+3%).

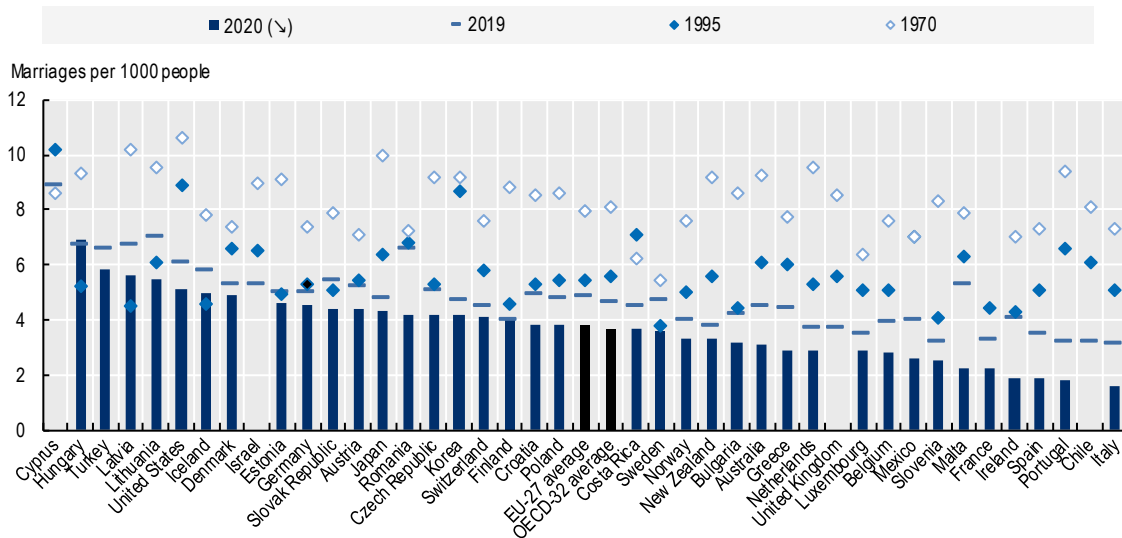
In almost all OECD countries, marriage rates have declined over the past few decades (Chart SF3.1.A). In 1970, most OECD countries had CMRs of somewhere between 7 and 10 marriages per 1000 people. By 1995, in most OECD countries, CMRs had fallen to around 5 to 7 marriages per 1000 people, and in many countries they have continued to fall since.

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Other relevant indicators: Family size and composition (SF1.1); Fertility rates (SF2.1); Mean age of mother at first childbirth (SF2.3) and Share of births outside marriage (SF2.4); and Cohabitation rates and prevalence of other forms of partnership (SF3.3).

Chart SF3.1.A. Crude marriage rate, 1970, 1995, 2019 and 2020 or latest available year

Marriages per 1000 people



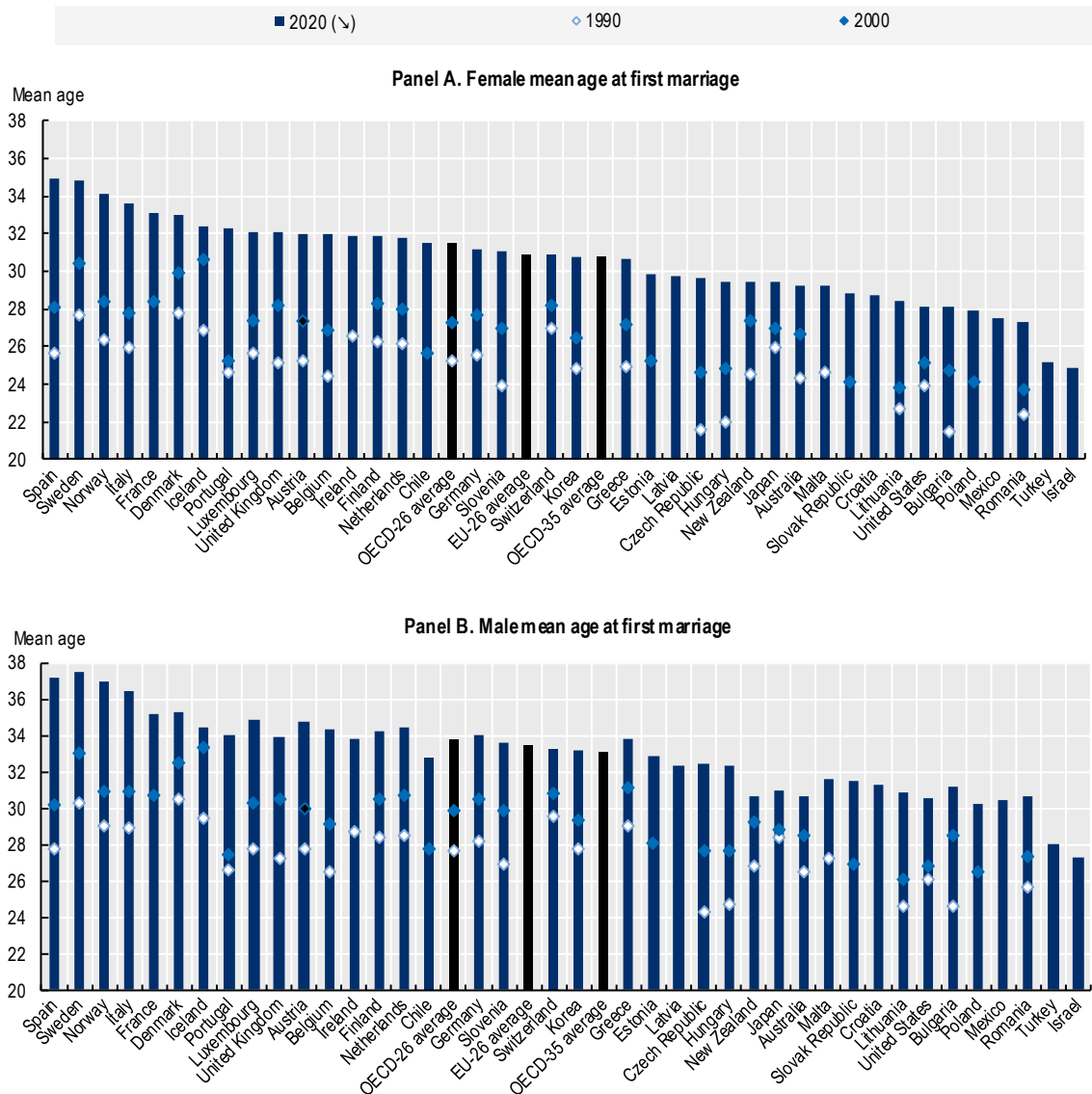
Note: Data for New Zealand only include civil unions. 2020 data is not available yet for Chile, Cyprus, Israel and the United Kingdom. The OECD-32 average is the unweighted average across the 32 OECD countries with data available for all 4 time points.

Sources. For European countries and Turkey, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for Costa Rica, INEC; for Chile, INE; for Israel, CBS; for Japan, Statistics Japan; for Korea, Korean Statistical Information Service; for Mexico, INEGI; for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand; for the United States, Centers for Disease Prevention and Control; for all other countries, United Nations Demographic Yearbook.

Across the OECD, declining marriage rates have been accompanied by increases in the average age of those getting married (Chart SF3.1.B). At the start of the 1990s, in most OECD countries, the mean age of women at first marriage stood at somewhere between 22 and 27 (Chart SF3.1.B, Panel A), and the mean age of men at first marriage between 24 and 30 (Chart SF3.1.B, Panel B). By 2020, these averages had increased for almost all OECD countries to somewhere between 27 and 33 for women and 29 and 35 for men. On average across OECD countries, the mean age at which women first get married is now 30.7, and the mean age for men 33.1.

Despite common historical trends, there remain notable differences across countries in the ages of individuals at first marriage (Chart SF3.1.B). The mean age of both women and men at first marriage is very high in the Mediterranean and Nordic countries, for example, especially in Spain and Sweden, where the mean age for women is almost 35 years old and for men it is above 36 years old. In Israel and in Turkey, by contrast, the average age at first marriage for women is about 25 and for men 28 or less. Differences between countries point to a variety of transition paths towards the formation of long-term partnerships: cohabitation has become an important form of long-term partnership in, for example, the Nordic countries, postponing and frequently replacing marriage as the partnership standard (see Family Database indicator SF3.3).

Chart SF3.1.B. Mean age at first marriage by sex, 1990, 2000, and 2020 or latest available year



Note: For 2020, data for Iceland and Malta to 2011, for Mexico to 2014, for Chile and Ireland to 2016, for Germany to 2017, for France and Greece to 2018, and for Austria, Finland, Israel, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom to 2019. Data for Mexico refer to all marriages rather than first marriages, and for Australia, New Zealand and the United States to median age at first marriage, rather than mean age at first marriage. Data for New Zealand include civil unions, and from 2007 onwards also those who transferred their civil union to a marriage. For the United Kingdom, data from 2014 onwards include marriages between same-sex partners. The OECD-26 average is the unweighted average across the 26 OECD countries with data available for all 3 time points.

Sources. for European countries and Turkey, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for Chile, INE; for Israel, CBS; for Japan, Statistics Japan; for Korea, Korean Statistical Information Service; for Mexico, INEGI; for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand; for the UK, Office for National Statistics; for the United States, US Census Bureau.

No OECD country allowed same-sex partners to marry in 1999, but by 2022 same-sex marriages are formally recognized in 24 OECD countries (or at least in some parts of their national territory). The Netherlands was the first country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001. In most other countries, marriage equality laws were passed after 2010. Moreover, in nine countries where same-sex marriage is not legal, same-sex couples are granted some form of legal recognition, either via rights and benefits associated with their de facto cohabitation (Israel since 1994, Hungary since 1996 and Poland since 2012) or via the possibility for them to enter into a registered partnership (Slovenia since 2005, the Czech Republic since 2006, Mexico since 2007, Greece since 2015, Estonia and Italy since 2016). Only six OECD countries do not provide any recognition of same-sex partnerships (Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, the Slovak Republic, and Turkey) (OECD, 2020, [Over the Rainbow? The Road to LGBTI Inclusion](#)).

On average across 17 OECD countries with available data, same-sex marriages represented 2.3% of all marriages in 2020, varying from 1.2% in Iceland to 3.7% in Australia. Except in three countries (Iceland, Ireland and Portugal), there were more female same-sex marriages than men same-sex marriages in 2020. On average 57% of same-sex marriages were among women (Table SF3.1.A).

Table SF3.1.A. Basic statistics on same-sex marriages in OECD countries in 2020

	Date of legal recognition	Share of all marriages	Share of female same-sex marriages
Australia	2017	3.7%	61%
Austria	2019	1.5%	55%
Belgium	2003	2.8%	51%
Canada	2005	..	..
Chile	March 2022	..	..
Colombia	2016	..	..
Costa Rica	May 2020	..	..
Denmark	2012	1.5%	63%
Finland	2017	1.8%	69%
France	2013	3.1%	..
Germany	2017	2.7%	53%
Iceland	2010	1.2%	45%
Ireland	2015	3.3%	46%
Luxembourg	2015	1.9%	69%
Mexico	2010 in Mexico City and 2016 in Jalisco	..	..
Netherlands	2001	2.2%	52%
New Zealand	2013	2.3%	..
Norway	2009	1.4%	67%
Portugal	2010	2.4%	47%
Spain	2005	3.5%	52%
Sweden	2009	1.3%	62%
Switzerland	July 2022	..	..
United Kingdom	2014	3.1%	57%
United States	2015	..	..
OECD average		2.3%	57%

Notes: .. Data not available. Data for Luxembourg refers to 2021. Data for the United Kingdom concern 2019 data for England, Scotland and Wales.

Source: Data collected from national Statistical Offices; dates from OECD, 2020, [Over the Rainbow? The Road to LGBTI Inclusion](#).

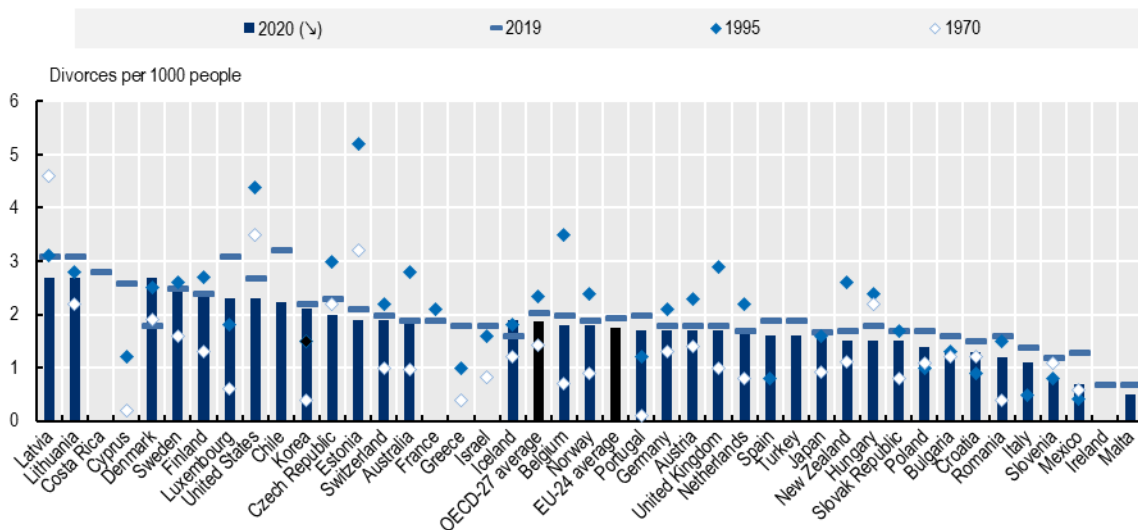
In 2020, crude divorce rates (CDRs) varied considerably across countries – from as low as 0.7 divorces per 1000 people in Ireland and Mexico to as high as 2.7 per 1000 in Denmark, Latvia and Lithuania.

Restrictions put in place during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic also had a direct impact on divorces in 2020 in most countries. On average across OECD countries, divorce rates declined by 10% in 2020. They declined most, by around 50% in Mexico, and by around one-third in Chile and Slovenia. Divorce rates declined in all OECD and EU countries except in Australia, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden where they were at the same rate as in 2019, and in Denmark where divorces rates increased by 50% in 2020, based from a low rate in 2019 due to a change in divorce law in 2019.

In the past decades, declining rates of marriage have been accompanied by increases in rates of divorce (Chart SF3.1.C). In comparison to 1970 for example, current CDRs in most OECD countries are generally high. All except five OECD countries with available data (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia and the United States) have CDRs that are higher now than they were in 1970, with many OECD countries (Belgium, Greece, Israel, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal) having seen their CDRs more than double over the period.

Chart SF3.1.C. Crude divorce rate, 1970, 1995, 2019 and 2020 or latest available year

Divorces per 1000 people



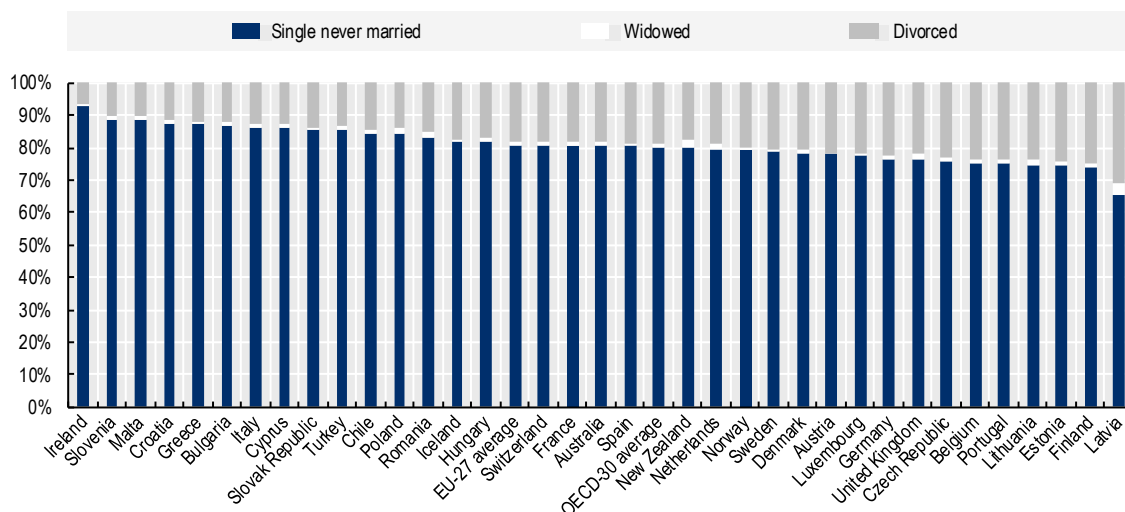
Note: Instead of 2019, data refer for Iceland to 2011, for France and the United Kingdom to 2016, for Greece and Ireland to 2017. The OECD27 average is the unweighted average across the 27 OECD countries with data available for all 4 time points.

Sources: for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for Chile, INE: estadísticas judiciales; for Israel, CBS; for Japan, Statistics Japan; for Korea, Korean Statistical Information Service; for the United States, Centers for Disease Prevention and Control; for all countries, United Nations Demographic Yearbook

Despite long-run increases in rates of divorce, most of the people getting married are still getting married for the first time. Chart SF1.3.D shows that for 2019 and on average across OECD countries, four in every five people getting married had not been married before, and less than one in five had previously been divorced. However, there are considerable cross-country differences. In Ireland, for example, over 92% of marrying people were 'single never married' and less than 7% were previously divorced, while in countries like Latvia and Finland less than 75% were 'single never married' and over 25% previously divorced.

Chart SF3.1.D. Distribution of marrying persons by previous marital status

Proportion (%) of all marrying persons with known previous marital status, 2019 or latest available year



Note: Data for Iceland to 2011, for Malta to 2014, for Ireland to 2015, for Chile and Germany to 2016, and for France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Malta to 2015. For some European countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden) and Switzerland, the data allow for the separate identification of people who were previously in a registered partnership. These people are included here under 'single never married'. For New Zealand, 'single never married' means never married and never in a civil union.

Sources: for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand.

Comparability and data issues

For all countries, statistics on marriage and divorce are based on civil registration. There are cross-national differences in the status of religious ceremonies – in some countries a religious marriage is recognised by the state as equivalent to a civil marriage, but not in others, such as France. Informal cohabitation and registered partnerships or civil unions are not taken into account in marriage statistics, except in New Zealand for civil unions.

In all OECD countries it is possible to divorce, but there is considerable cross-country variation in the length and nature of the divorce process and these differences should be borne in mind when comparing divorce rates and mean durations of marriage across countries. For example, in some European countries there are regulations regarding the minimum period that spouses must have lived apart in order for a divorce to be granted. In addition, cross-national differences in trends in divorce rates may be influenced by developments in divorce regulation and legislation. This is particularly the case in Ireland, where the prohibition of divorce was repealed in 1997.

Sources and further reading:

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