

### SF3.1: Marriage and divorce rates

#### Marriage rates

##### *Definitions and methodology*

The *crude marriage rate* is the number of marriages formed each year as a ratio to 1 000 people. This measure disregards other formal cohabitation contracts and informal partnerships (SF3.3).

The *proportion of first marriage* estimates the percentage of population who married for the first time among all the population who married during the referred calendar year. The *mean age at first marriage* refers to the age of men and/or women when they first get married, and the *gender age gap at first marriage* measures the difference in the mean age at first marriage between men and women. (For definitions on divorce indicators see below.)

##### *Key findings*

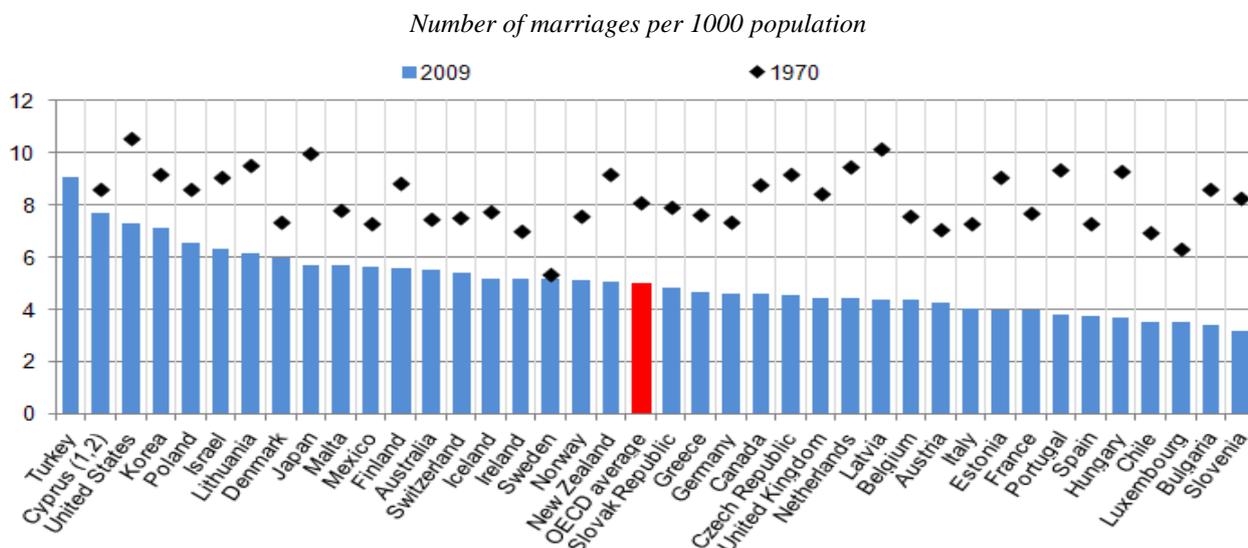
Chart SF3.1.A illustrates the noticeable decline in the crude marriage rate which occurred since 1970 in almost all OECD and EU countries. The decline has been substantial in, for example, Hungary and Portugal, but was limited in Denmark or Sweden where in 1970 marriage rates were already relatively low. The decline in crude marriage rates does not necessarily mean that fewer couple partnerships are being formed as there has been a significant increase in the prevalence of other forms of partnership (SF3.3).

The decline in marriage rates since 1970 coincides with the decrease in the proportion of first marriages in the total number of marriages (Chart SF3.1.B). In all OECD countries, for which data are available, this proportion decreased strongly from 1970 to the mid 1990s. Since the mid 1990s, the pace of decline has been reduced, and the downward trend has almost come to a halt in Denmark and the Slovak Republic. The decrease in the proportion of first marriage implies that the incidence of re-marriage has increased. Nevertheless, first marriage still represents more than 80% of all marriages in almost half of the countries from which data is available (Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic and Spain).

The mean age at first marriage varies considerably across OECD countries, from a minimum of just over 25 years in Poland to around 32 years in Switzerland (Chart SF3.1.C). This difference between countries points 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 (SF3.3). Chart SF3.1.C also shows important differences between men and women in the age at first marriage. On average, in all countries, men are older than women when they marry for the first time. This gender difference is very small in Portugal at 1.6 years and largest in Switzerland at 3.3 years. Trends also differ across countries (Chart SF3.1.D): the gap has increased markedly in Austria, Luxembourg and Switzerland, and declined most significantly in Greece, Italy and Portugal.

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: The decline in crude marriage rates between 1970 and 2009\***



Note: \* Data refers to 2008 for Cyprus, Iceland and Turkey; 2007 for the United States, Japan, New Zealand, Korea, the United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, Mexico, Canada and EU27; 2006 for Israel and Chile.

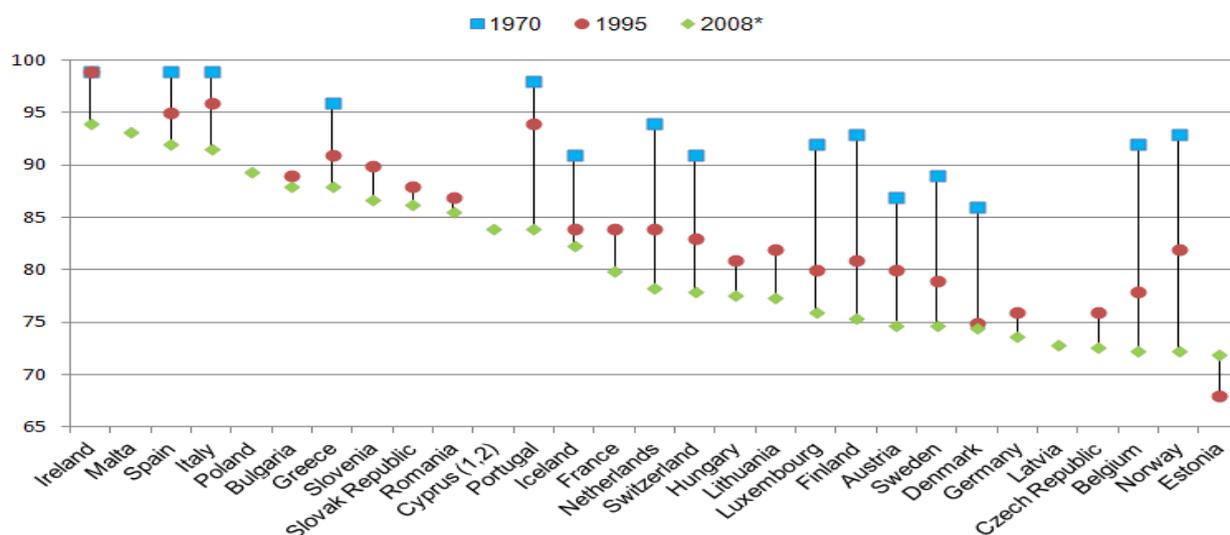
1 Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”.

2 Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

3 The data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Source: Eurostat, 2012, and United Nations Statistical Division, 2011.

**Chart SF3.1.B: Proportion of first marriage**



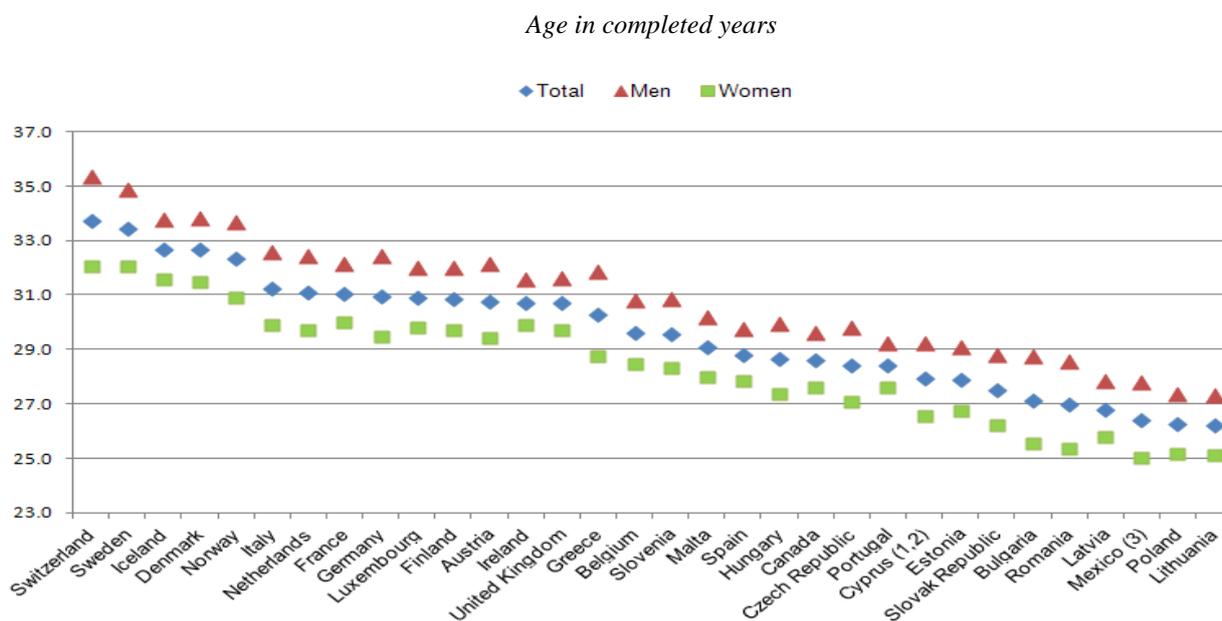
Countries are ranked by descending order of the proportion of first marriage in 2008

Note: \* Data refers to 2007 for Italy, France and Belgium; 2006 for Ireland, Spain and Switzerland.

1 and 2, see notes 1 and 2 for Chart SF3.1.A

Sources: Eurostat, 2012, and National Statistical Offices, 2010.

**Chart SF3.1.C: Age at first marriage, year 2008\***



Countries are ranked by descending order of the mean age at first marriage for the total of population

Note: \* Data refer to 2007 for Italy and Belgium; 2006 for the United Kingdom and Ireland; 2003 for Canada and Mexico; 2002 for Spain and Cyprus.

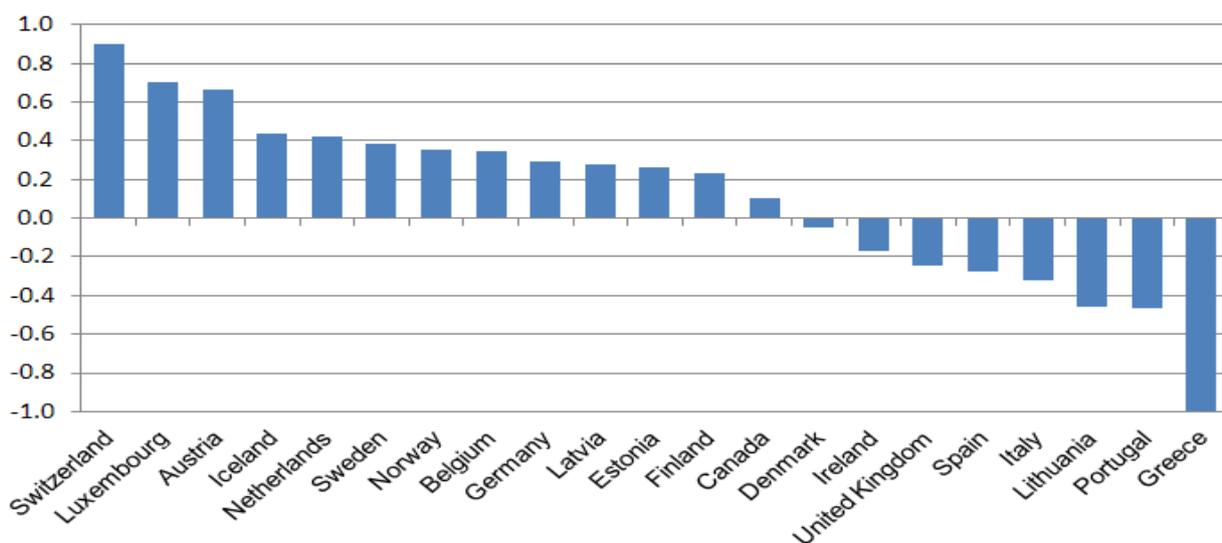
1 and 2, see notes 1 and 2 for Chart SF3.1.A

3 Data refer to all marriage and not only the first for Mexico.

Source: Eurostat, 2012, and National Statistical Offices, 2010.

**Chart SF3.1.D Variation in the gender age gap at first marriage**

*Change from 1995 to 2008\*, in years*



Note: \* Data refers to change from 1995 to 2007 for Belgium and Italy; to 2006 for Ireland and the United Kingdom; to 2003 for Canada; to 2002 for Spain.

Source: Eurostat, 2012, and National Statistical Offices, 2010.

### *Comparability and data issues*

In all countries, statistics on marriage are based on civil registration. There are cross-national differences in the status of religious ceremonies: in many European countries including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom a religious marriage is recognized by the state as equivalent to a civil marriage. In some countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand, see SF3.3), partners who live together for a specified period of time have the same legal status as a married couple. These couples are not taken into account in the marriage statistics, although this legal framework in Australia and New Zealand certainly influences the propensity to “marry”.

Age at marriage refers to the age of individuals during the year of marriage (which is estimated when it is not directly provided by countries, see Eurostat, 2006). The procedure for conversion of marriage rates by age at last birthday to rates by age reached in the calendar year is described in Calot and Sardon (2003), and involves a risk of slightly overestimating the true birthday at marriage (and the same applies to indicators on the age at divorce and mean duration of marriage at divorce, see below). Note also that estimates of the mean age at marriage include all marriage in Mexico. The number of second or subsequent marriage is however low in this country.

## **Divorce rates**

### *Definitions and methodology*

The *crude divorce rate* expresses the ratio of the number of marriages which are dissolved in a given year to the average population in that year. The value is given per 1000 inhabitants.

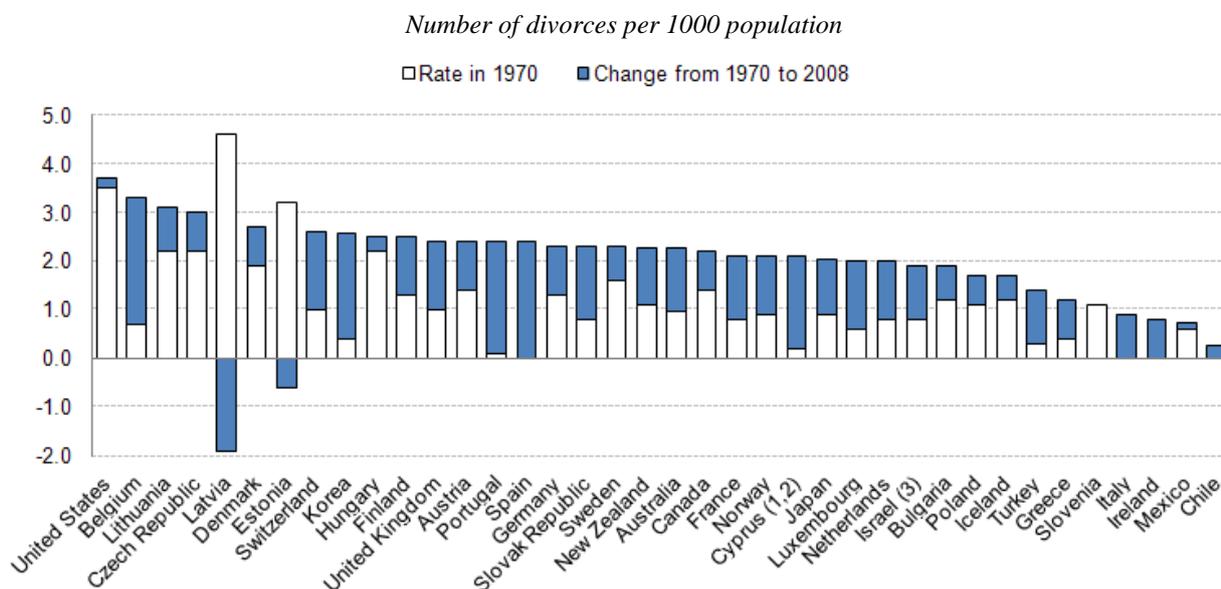
The *mean duration of marriage at divorce* by calendar year is obtained by adding the series of divorce rates by duration of marriage for the year under consideration and by calculating the mean of this sum (Calot and Sardon, 2003).

### *Key findings*

The crude divorce rates and their changes from 1970 to 2008 are presented in Chart SF3.1.E. During this period, divorce rates increased in most countries, except for Estonia and Latvia where divorce rates were high in 1970 (the increase in divorce rates in the United States from a similar base was also very small). There were large cross-national differences in crude divorce rates in 2008, and ranged from a low of less than one divorce per 1000 inhabitants in Chile and Mexico, to over 3 per 1000 inhabitants in Belgium and the United States.

Although divorce rates have markedly increased since 1970, this does not seem to have had a noticeable effect upon the mean duration of marriage (Chart SF3.1.F). The average duration of marriage is above 15 years in Italy Slovenia and Spain, but otherwise cross-national variation in the average duration of marriage is limited with the mean duration of all other countries ranging from 10 to 15 years.

**Chart SF3.1.E: The increase in crude divorce rates from 1970 to 2008\***



Where data for 1970 is missing, the change refers to the crude marriage rate for 2008.

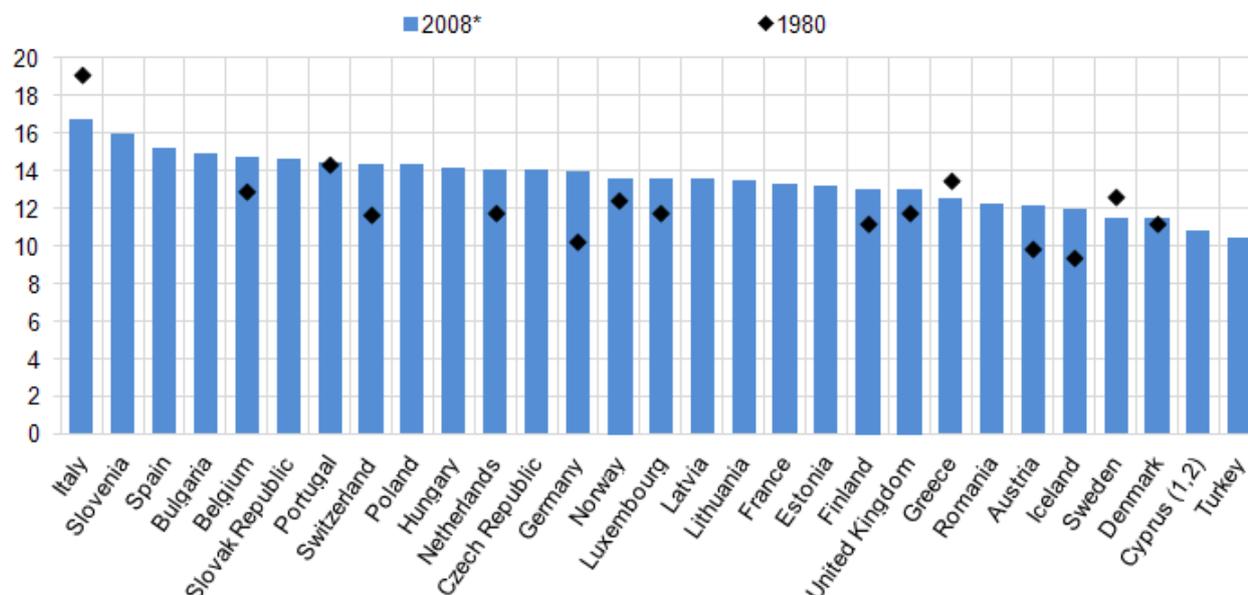
Countries are ranked by descending order of crude divorce rates in 2008.

Note: \* Data refers to 2007 for the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Japan, Greece, Ireland and Mexico; 2006 for the United States, France, Israel and Chile.

1, 2 and 3, see notes 1, 2 and 3 for Chart SF3.1.A

Source: Eurostat, 2012, and United Nations Statistical Division, 2010.

**Chart SF3.1.F: Mean duration of marriage to divorce, 1980 and 2008\***



Countries are ranked in descending order of mean duration from marriage to divorce in 2008

Note: \* Data refers to 2007 for Italy, Belgium, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Greece; 2006 for France

1 and 2, see notes 1 and 2 for Chart SF3.1.A

Source: Eurostat, 2012.

### *Comparability and data issues*

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 difference should be borne in mind when comparing divorce rates and mean durations of marriage across countries. For example, in many European countries including Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, there are regulations regarding the minimum period that spouses must have lived apart in order for a divorce to be granted.

*Sources and further reading:* Calot G., J.P. Sardon (2003), *Methodology for the calculation of Eurostat's demographic indicators, Population and social conditions* 3/2003/F/no 26, Eurostat, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-CC-04-004/EN/KS-CC-04-004-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-CC-04-004/EN/KS-CC-04-004-EN.PDF); D'Addio, A.C and M. Mira d'Ercole (2005), "*Trends and Determinants of Fertility Rates in OECD Countries: the Role of Policies*", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper, No. 27; OECD (2007), *Society at a Glance* and Eurostat (2006); Demographic statistics: Nuptiality. Eurostat Metadata in SDDS format. Summary methodology, Eurostat; Calot G., and J.P. Sardon (2003), *Methodology for the calculation of Eurostat's demographic indicators, Population and Social Conditions*, 3/2003/F/26, Eurostat, also Eurostat Metadata in SDDS Format: Summary Methodology, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/demo\\_nup\\_sm1.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/demo_nup_sm1.htm), Eurostat, 2010; UN Statistics Division, 2010.