

SF3.3: Cohabitation rate and prevalence of other forms of partnership

Definitions and methodology

Over the last decades, patterns in partnership formation and living arrangements have changed significantly in most OECD countries. In general, marriage rates have declined and divorce rates increased (SF3.1), and increasingly cohabitation is used as a stepping stone for marriage or as a stable alternative to it.

A partnership is here defined to involve two adults living together in the same dwelling, with or without other adults and/or children. There are different forms of such partnerships, including certified married couples and cohabiting couples. Cohabiting couples include those who have formalized their relationship through a civil union and/or legal contract and those who have not registered their relationship (but report their cohabiting status in Censuses and other relevant surveys).

In some countries, cohabiting partners have the possibility to enter in a “civil union” to legalize their relationship without marrying. For example, in 11 European countries couples are offered the possibility to legalize their union with a distinct registration procedure other than marriage (i.e. in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). Furthermore, in Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands, the possibility to marry was recently extended to same-sex partners. In some other countries, cohabiting partners who have not registered their union, but who have lived together for an specified period of time are considered to have the same obligations as married couples or partners who have otherwise formalized their relationship. For example, in Australia and New Zealand, couples living together for respectively 6 months and 3 years are legally considered to be in a partnership with status equal to marriage.

The indicators on partnership status (Table SF3.3.A) refer to the proportion of adults 20 years of age and older who live as a single adult or in a one couple household, being either married or cohabiting. Partnered adults who are not married, are categorized as cohabiting (regardless of the formal status of their relationship). In most countries, cohabitation refers to relationships between men and women, but “same-sex” partnerships can be included in a few countries (see comparability and data issues). Adults can also be in “other” situations which include households with two or more couple-families, or couples sharing the household with otherwise single adults, people living in collective institutions (e.g. military barracks, homes for the elderly and/or health/care institutions). Table SF3.3.B focuses on couples and the legal status of their partnership, also considering the number of children living in relevant households.

Key findings

Table SF3.3.A shows that across the OECD almost 57% of individuals age 20 and older lives in a couple household. Most of them are married, but there is also a substantial proportion (i.e. larger than 10%) of cohabiting couples in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Luxembourg, and Norway. In all countries, cohabitation is more frequent among the youngest adults aged from 20 to 34 years.

Single young adults frequently live with their parents, and this proportion exceeds 40% in the Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, and Spain.

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 Marriage and divorce rates (SF3.1)

Table SF3.3.A Partnership and prevalence of cohabitation, recent years¹

In % of population of both sexes

	All ages from 20 years old				ages 20-34 ²				
	Single, living alone	Married	Cohabiting	Other	Single, living alone	Married	Cohabiting	In parental home	Other
Australia ³	18.5	51.2	8.9	21.4	:	:	:	:	:
Austria	16.5	48.3	6.5	28.7	15.3	32.6	13.7	32.4	6.0
Belgium	19.5	48.6	6.4	25.6	18.8	22.0	5.2	54.1	
Bulgaria	14.0	42.4	4.2	39.4	6.4	18.9	2.8	71.9	
Canada	10.7	39.3	8.9	41.1	:	:	:	:	:
Cyprus ^{4,5}	6.3	61.7	0.9	41.9	4.1	47.6	2.1	33.8	12.4
Czech Republic	14.8	51.6	2.9	30.7	11.9	39.0	4.2	40.1	4.9
Denmark	24.1	40.8	11.5	23.5	33.7	25.4	28.6	7.6	4.8
Estonia	18.2	43.9	11.8	26.1	14.1	31.8	23.5	27.4	3.2
Finland	19.6	43.6	11.8	25.0	20.8	27.0	28.3	17.7	6.2
France	22.8	44.6	14.4	18.2	19.4	21.3	21.8	37.5	
Germany	16.4	47.5	5.3	30.7	20.3	33.7	13.6	23.9	8.5
Greece	8.0	56.4	1.7	33.9	6.0	36.4	3.1	45.5	8.9
Hungary	12.0	50.9	6.3	30.7	6.6	39.4	11.5	36.0	6.5
Ireland	10.6	53.4	5.9	30.0	5.5	27.6	13.4	45.2	8.3
Italy	10.8	53.9	2.0	33.2	5.8	30.5	3.0	51.1	9.5
Japan	15.4 ⁶	47.5	2.0 ⁷	:	:	34.8	:	:	:
Latvia	16.5	58.0	5.5	20.0	7.5	35.0	6.3	51.2	0.0
Lithuania	14.2	55.0	4.1	26.6	15.4	69.2	8.3	0.0	7.1
Luxembourg	19.1	58.2	14.0	8.7	18.0	23.3	11.4	47.2	
Malta	7.0	40.1	2.1	50.8	3.1	31.4	0.8	64.7	
Netherlands	15.8	48.1	9.3	26.9	19.5	29.9	21.9	19.9	8.8
New Zealand ³	17.6	48.6	9.3 ⁸	24.5	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	19.3	44.1	10.7	25.8	21.0	25.0	22.7	26.6	4.7
Poland	11.2	56.3	1.3	31.1	8.0	40.7	1.9	43.5	6.0
Portugal	7.0	56.5	4.1	32.4	4.1	40.5	5.9	39.0	10.6
Romania	7.6	56.1	4.3	32.0	3.1	48.8	7.4	31.4	9.3
Slovenia	9.6	52.7	5.4	32.3	3.8	27.5	8.8	57.0	2.8
Slovak Republic	14.6	54.5	1.4	29.4	10.8	40.5	1.7	42.9	4.1
Spain	8.6	53.6	3.3	34.5	5.4	27.3	5.5	52.1	9.7
Switzerland	17.5	49.3	5.9	27.4	20.7	35.2	12.3	21.3	10.5
Turkey	3.9	45.7	0.2	50.3	2.4	37.8	0.0	59.7	
United Kingdom	14.9	47.3	8.7	29.0	11.4	32.2	22.2	24.7	9.6
United States	13.4	52.9	5.5	28.2	:	:	:	:	:
OECD-25	15.2	49.9	6.8	27.9	14.3	31.4	12.4	36.4	7.7

1 Data refer 2010: Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Switzerland and the United States; 2011: Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovenia; 2006 for Australia, New Zealand and Canada; 2007 for Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Luxembourg, Malta, and Turkey.

2 For Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Luxembourg, Malta and Turkey: age 25 to 39.

3 Age from 15 onwards

4 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".

5 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.

6 The percentage of the population 15 years and over.

7 2002 Japanese National Fertility Survey; age 18-49

8 The data refer to the proportion of cohabiting people among those who have never married.

Sources: Australia: 2006 Census of population; Canada: 2006 Census of Population; New Zealand: 2006 Census; Japan: Statistical Survey Department, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications; for European countries: 2000 Round of Censuses of Population and Housing, Eurostat except for Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Luxembourg, Malta and Turkey: ELFS, 2011; and, United States: US Census 2010.

Table SF3.3.B shows that married couples are more likely to have children than cohabiting couples in all OECD countries, except for Norway (while differences are small in Estonia, Portugal and Slovenia). Compared to married couples, cohabiting partners are less likely to have 2 or more children. Marriage and childbirth of second and more children are strongly associated, although births out of wedlock are increasing (SF2.4).

Table SF3.3.B: Partnership status and children¹, year 2010²?

	Married				Cohabiting				
	without children		with children		without children		with children		
	1	2	3 and more	1	2	3 and more	1	2	3 and more
Austria	39.7	24.4	25.4	10.5	55.1	27.3	13.7	3.9	
Canada	43.6		56.4		55.1		44.9		
Czech Republic	35.8	27.0	30.6	6.5	49.5	26.4	16.7	7.4	
Cyprus^{3,4}	32.8	20.9	28.0	18.2	83.7	8.8	5.5	2.0	
Denmark	53.4	16.4	21.6	8.6	58.4	20.7	16.3	4.6	
Estonia	39.9	28.9	23.9	7.3	41.0	33.4	18.8	6.8	
Spain	30.7	27.6	31.1	10.7	52.8	24.8	15.9	6.5	
Finland	45.8	21.1	21.2	11.8	60.3	20.1	14.2	5.3	
France	44.3	22.8	21.4	11.5	:	:	:	:	
Germany	53.5	19.9	19.7	6.9	70.3	19.6	7.7	2.1	
Greece	35.3	27.3	29.3	8.1	69.2	16.1	10.9	3.8	
Hungary	39.4	27.6	25.5	7.6	50.0	27.2	14.4	8.4	
Ireland	26.7	21.2	26.3	25.8	61.6	20.3	11.4	6.7	
Italy	33.1	30.1	28.5	8.3	54.2	27.9	13.2	4.7	
Lithuania	48.4	25.1	21.4	5.1	52.3	26.7	14.1	6.9	
Netherlands	44.5	19.4	24.8	11.4	73.3	14.8	9.3	2.6	
Norway	42.3	19.4	24.1	14.3	37.8	28.3	25.0	8.9	
Poland	28.8	29.1	27.9	14.2	43.9	29.0	16.3	10.8	
Portugal	34.8	33.1	25.5	6.6	38.2	32.2	19.5	10.1	
Romania	37.8	32.1	22.3	7.8	42.9	27.7	16.6	12.7	
Slovenia	28.0	28.7	35.4	7.8	30.2	39.8	25.0	4.8	
Slovak Republic	27.4	25.3	33.1	14.2	36.8	25.3	20.8	17.1	
Switzerland	44.9	20.0	24.4	10.7	80.9	11.0	6.1	2.0	
United Kingdom	47.3	52.7	0.0	0.0	58.8	41.2	0.0	0.0	
OECD-19	39.5	27.4	24.5	10.4	55.9	25.4	13.6	6.2	

1 age from 20 years old

2 year: 2009: France; 2010: Estonia, Finland, Switzerland; 2011: Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom; 2002: Ireland, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia; and, 2006 for Canada.

3 and 4 see notes 4 and 5 of Table SF3.3.A.

Source: Canada: 2006 Census of Population; for EU countries and Switzerland: 2011 Round of Censuses of Population and Housing, Eurostat.

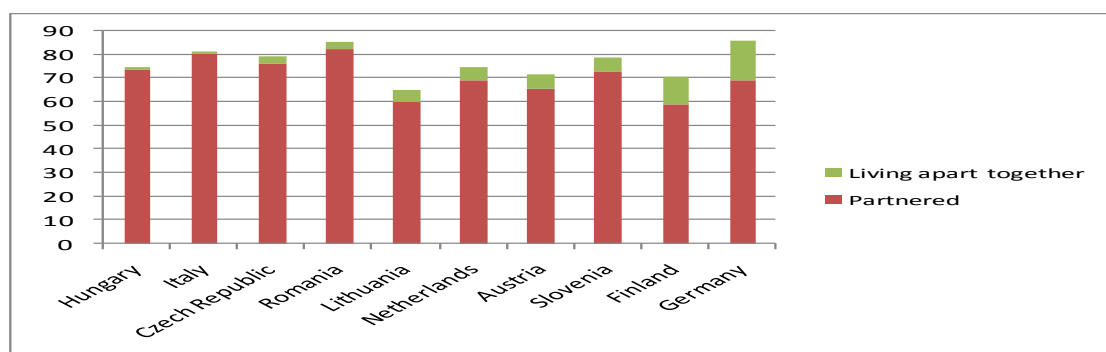
Comparability and data issues

It remains difficult to capture the diversification of partnership formation and living arrangements in statistics. Data presented here have been mainly collected through national Censuses on Population and Housing. For countries for which such information is not available (Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Luxembourg, Malta and Turkey), *Labour Force Surveys* have been used to obtain estimates, by mapping information on household composition and marital status. In both these data sources, married couples only include those people who have a marriage certificate, while couples who are otherwise legally recognized are grouped under cohabiting couples. It is, however, not always clear whether the countries that recognize contractual partnerships other than marriage can separately identify these couples in the statistics. In any case, their number should not be overestimated: OECD (2009) shows that the number of adult individuals who are registered in a civil partnership varies from 1% in Denmark, Germany or Sweden to 6% in Belgium, Hungary and the Netherlands.

The identification of the prevalence of “same-sex partnerships” in internationally comparable statistics is also difficult (Digoix and Festy, 2004). In most countries, these partnerships are not included in the data on partnered individuals as reported in Tables SF3.3.A and SF3.3.B. Estimates exist for some countries. For example in Canada, the 2006 census finds that “same-sex partners” constitute about 2.5% of the adults living in partnership. Data on civil registration rates of same-sex partnership can also be calculated for countries where this option exists (e.g. where 81% of the Civil unions concern “same-sex partnerships”) and, but such data are a poor proxy for the overall prevalence of this form of partnership (Festy, 2006).

The phenomenon of adults “*living apart together*”, i.e. those who declare to be partnered (and share living arrangements during part of the reference period) but who maintain their separate residences, poses particular challenges to the statistics on partnered and single individuals. Again, the categorisation of the adults involved as either single adults or partnered adults may vary across individual cases and from country to country. Chart SF3.3.A shows that the inclusion of living apart together relationships can significantly affect the prevalence of partnered adults in the statistics, for example, in Germany or Finland.

Chart SF3.3.A: Partners “living apart together”, year 2001-2003



Source: Speder (2007) from the Population Policy Acceptance Survey

Sources and further reading: 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, Paris; Digoix M., and P. Festy (eds.), *Same-sex Couples, Same-sex Partnerships and homosexual Marriage*. A focus on cross-national differences, Document de Travail 124, INED, http://www.ined.fr/fichier/t_publication/1035/publi_pdf1_124.pdf; Eurostat (2008), Demographic statistics: Nuptiality. Eurostat Metadata in SDDS format. Summary methodology, Eurostat; Festy P. (2006), “Legal recognition of Same-Sex Couples in Europe”, *Population*, 61(4), pp. 417-453; OECD (2009) *Society at a Glance*, OECD, Paris; Sobotka T. and L. Toulemon. (2008), “Changing family and partnership behaviour: Common trends and persistent diversity across Europe”, *Demographic Research*, 19(6), pp. 85-138; and, Speder Z. (2007), “Diversity of Family Structure in Europe”, *Demografia*, Budapest.