

### 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 the 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’.

Divorce is captured by one measure:

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

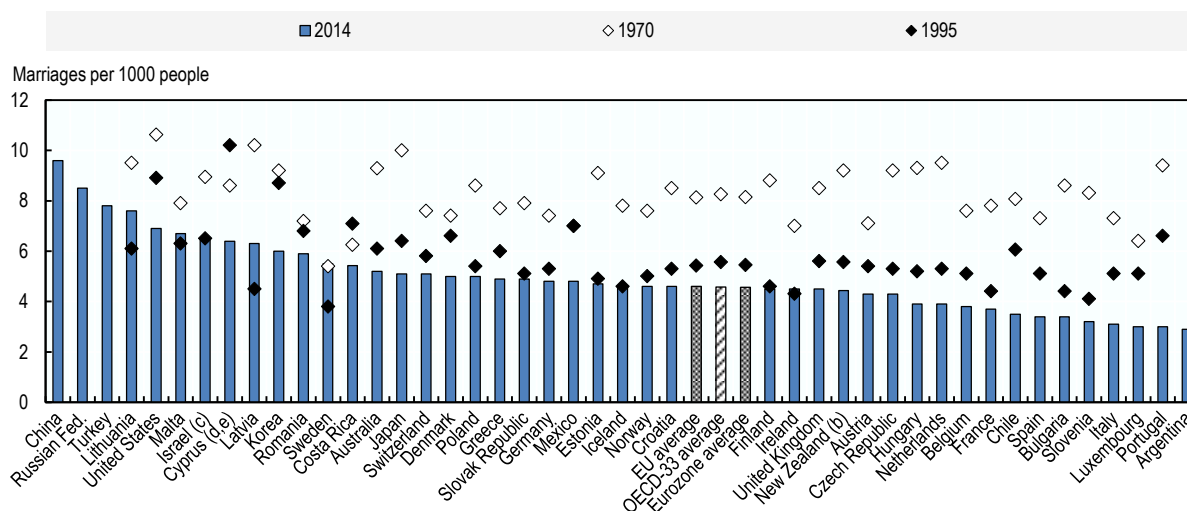
#### *Key findings*

Crude marriage rates (CMRs) differ considerably across OECD countries (Chart SF3.1.A). In some – such as Chile, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Slovenia – CMRs are very low at 3.5 or fewer marriages per 1000 people. In others – such as the United States and Turkey – rates are twice that at around 7 per 1000 or above. However, in most OECD countries CMRs are somewhere between 4 and 5.5 marriages per 1000, with the OECD average standing at 4.6.

Rates of marriage are declining in almost all OECD countries (Chart SF3.1.A). In 1970, most OECD countries had a CMR of around 7 to 9 marriages per 1000 people; by 1995, CMRs had fallen to the extent that most had a rate of around 5 to 7 marriages per 1000 people. And in many OECD countries, CMRs continued to fall after 1995. In Portugal, for example, CMRs more than halved between 1995 and 2014 – from 6.6 marriages per 1000 in the former to 3.0 in the later – while in four others (Chile, Korea, Luxembourg and Mexico) CMRs fell by at least 2 marriages per 1000. Only Ireland, Latvia and Sweden saw CMRs increase between 1995 and 2014 (or nearest available).

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).
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**Chart SF3.1.A. Crude marriage rate, 1970, 1995 and 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Marriages per 1000 people



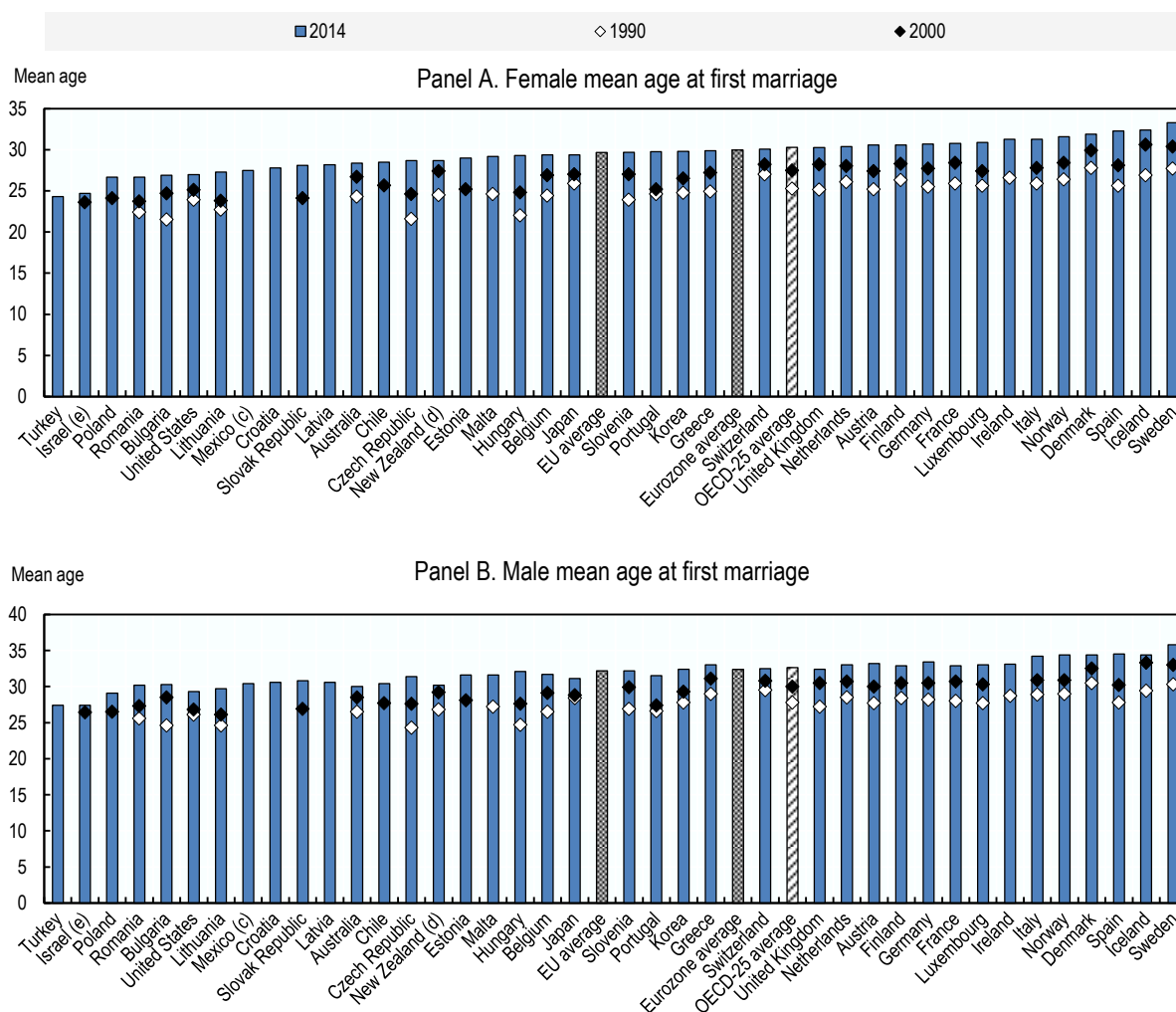
- a) Data for Iceland and the United Kingdom refer to 2011, for Belgium, France, Ireland, Israel, China and the Russian Federation to 2012, and for Austria, Chile, and Cyprus to 2013
- b) Data for New Zealand include civil unions.
- c) The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility 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.
- d) 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";
- e) 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.

Sources: [for European countries, 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 countries, United Nations World Marriage Data 2008](#); [for all countries, United Nations Demographic Yearbook](#)

Across the OECD, declining CMRs have been accompanied by increases in the average age of those getting married (Chart SF3.1.B). At the start of the 1990s the OECD-25 average mean age at first marriage for women was 25.3 (Panel A), while the OECD-25 average mean age for men was 27.8 (Panel B). By 2014, the OECD-25 average mean age at first marriage for both women and men had increased by about 5 years to 30.3 and 32.6, respectively. In no OECD country did the average age of either women or men at first marriage fall between 1990 and 2014 (or nearest available).

Despite common historical trends there remain notable differences between countries in the ages of individuals at marriage (Chart SF3.1.B). The mean age of both women and men at first marriage is very high in the Nordic countries, for example, especially Sweden where the mean age for women reaches as high as 33.3 and for men 35.8. In Israel and in Turkey, by contrast, the average age of women at first marriage is below 25 and of men is less than 28. The 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.B. Mean<sup>a</sup> age at first marriage by sex, 1990, 2000 and 2014 or latest available year<sup>b</sup>**



a) For Australia, Israel, New Zealand and the United States, median age at first marriage

b) Data for Belgium refer to 2010, for France, Iceland, Ireland and Malta to 2011, for Austria and the United Kingdom to 2012, and for Chile and Israel to 2013

c) For Mexico, data refer to all marriages and not only first marriages.

d) Data for New Zealand include civil unions. From 2007 onwards, data include those who transferred their civil union to a marriage.

e) See note c) in chart SF3.1.A

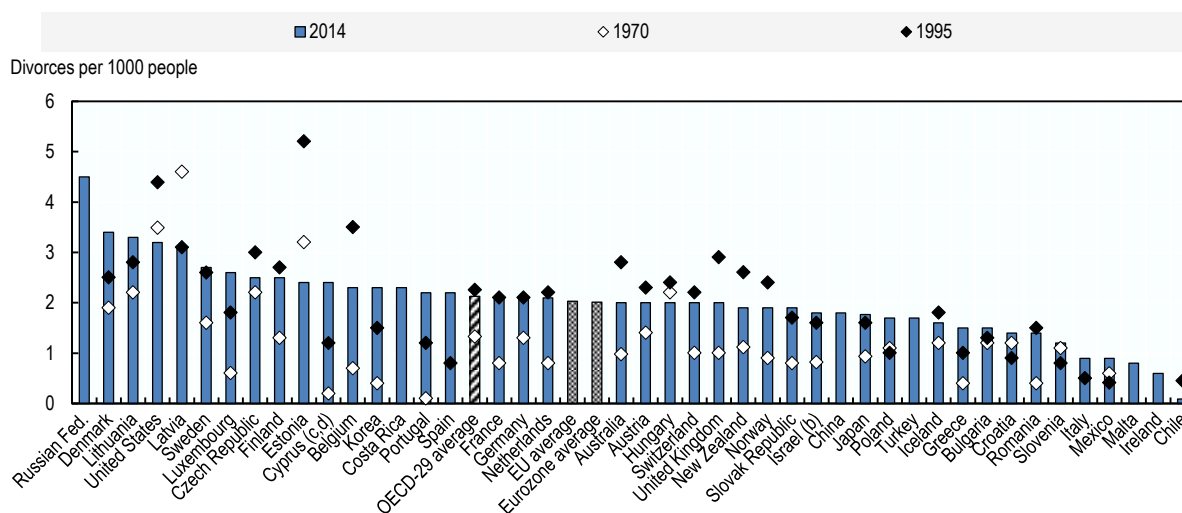
Sources: [for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics](#); [for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); [for Chile, INE](#); [for Israel, CBS](#); [for Japan, Statistics Japan](#); [for Korea, Korean Statistical Information Service](#); [for Mexico, INEGI](#); [for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand](#); [for the UK, Office for National Statistics](#); [for the United States, US Census Bureau](#)

Declining rates of marriage have also been accompanied by increases in Crude Divorce Rates (CDRs) (Chart SF3.1.C). CDRs vary across countries – from as low as 0.1 divorces per 1000 people in Chile to as high as 3.4 in Denmark – but in comparison to 1970, for example, current CDRs in most OECD countries are generally high. The OECD average CDR increased by over 50 percent between 1970 and 2012 – from 1.3 divorces per 1000 in 1970 to 2.1 in 2012 – with CDRs increasing in most OECD countries between the two time points.

In recent years trends in divorce rates have become a little more mixed (Chart SF3.1.C). In some OECD countries CDRs have continued to increase – between 1995 and 2014 (or nearest available), for instance, CDRs increased in 14 of those OECD countries with available data. In others, however, they have

started to fall. In Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Norway, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, for example, CDRs fell by at least 0.5 divorces per 1000 people between 1995 and 2014. Declines since 1995 are most pronounced though in the United States (where the CDR fell from 4.4 divorces per 1000 in 1995 to 3.2 in 2014) and Estonia (where the CDR has fallen by almost 3 divorces per 1000 since 1995), although in the latter case at least part of the decline can be explained by an unusually high number of divorces in 1995, caused most likely by the introduction of a new family law that eased and simplified divorce procedures (Philipov and Dorbritz, 2003: 88).

**Chart SF3.1.C. Crude divorce rate, 1970, 1995 and 2014 or latest available year<sup>c</sup>**  
 Divorces per 1000 people



a) Data for Chile refer to 2010, for France and Iceland to 2011, for Austria, Belgium, Ireland, the United Kingdom, China, the Russian Federation, and Cyprus to 2012, and for Greece, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal and Croatia to 2013

b) see note c) in Chart SF3.1.A

c) see note d) in Chart SF3.1.A

d) see note e) in Chart SF3.1.A

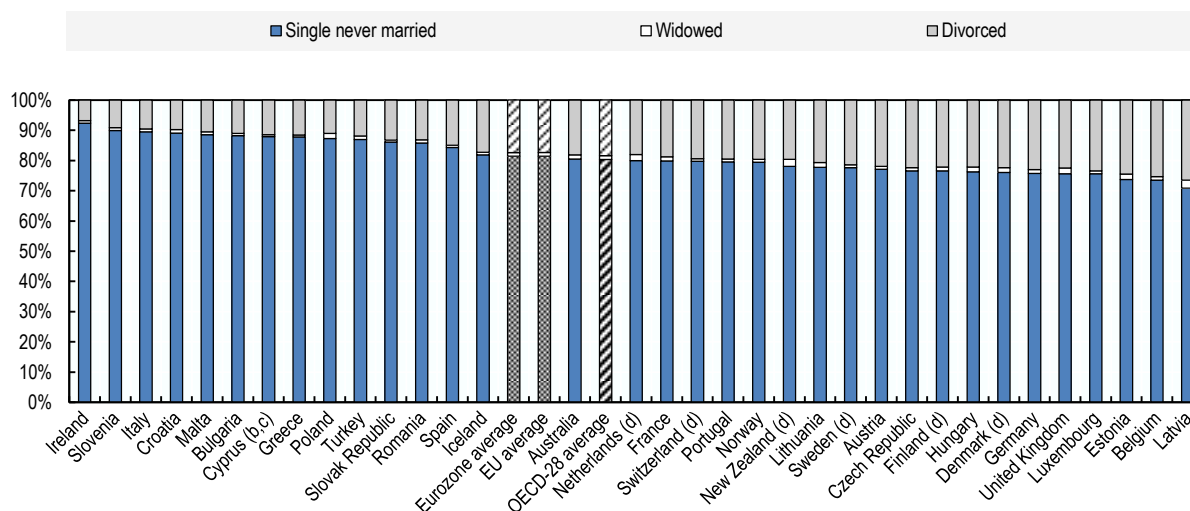
Sources: for European countries, Eurostat Demographic Statistics; for Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics; for Israel, CBS; for Japan, Statistics Japan; for Korea, Korean Statistical Information Service; for the United States, Centers for Disease Prevention and Control; for all countries, United Nations World Marriage Data 2008; for all countries, United Nations Demographic Yearbook

Despite long-run increases in rates of divorce, most of those people getting married are still getting married for the first time. Chart SF1.3.D shows that for 2014 and on average across OECD countries over four-in-five people getting married had not been married before and less than one-in-five had previously been divorced. There are considerable cross-country differences – in Ireland, for example, over 92% of marrying people in 2014 were ‘single never married’ with less than 7% previously divorced, while in Latvia and Belgium less than 74% were ‘single never married’ and over 25% previously divorced.

### 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 European countries – such as the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia and Poland – a religious marriage is recognised by the state as equivalent to a civil marriage, but not in others such as France. In some countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand, see SF3.3), partners who live together for a specified period of time have a similar legal status as a married couple. These couples are not taken into account in the marriage statistics.

**Chart SF3.1.D. Distribution of marrying persons by previous marital status, 2014 or latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 Proportion (%) of all marrying persons with known previous marital status



a) Data for Belgium refer to 2010, for France, Iceland and Ireland to 2011, for the United Kingdom to 2012, and for Austria and Cyprus to 2013.

b) see note d) in Chart SF3.1.A

c) see note e) in chart SF3.1.A

d) For some European countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, 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](#)

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:* 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); OECD (2016), *Society at a Glance 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris; Philipov, D, and J. Dorbritz. (2003) *Demographic consequences of economic transition in countries of Central and Eastern Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing