

SF3.2. Family dissolution and children

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on the nature and characteristics of family dissolution, divorce and separation in terms of the duration of marriage prior to divorce and the number of children affected by divorce. Information is presented through three main measures:

- *The distribution of divorce by the duration of the marriage* in years, with the preceding marriages grouped into those that lasted: less than 1 year, 1 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, 15 to 19 years, and 20 or more years.
- *The distribution of divorce by the number of children involved*, with ‘children involved’ defined as children under the age of 18 who depend on either of the parties to a divorce at the time the petition for divorce is filed. Children of any previous partnership are also included. Data are presented both for whether or not any child is involved, and in disaggregated form by the number of children affected (1 child, 2 children, or 3 or more children).

Data for these first two measures refer to the number of divorces and not to the number of persons divorcing, with data derived from civil registration statistics. “Divorce” in these cases is defined as the final legal dissolutions of a marriage, which confer on the parties the right to remarry as defined by the laws of each country or area. Legal separations which do not allow remarriage are excluded from divorce statistics. All the persons living within the borders of a country are covered, unless otherwise specified.

Because family dissolution may not always involve couples that are legally married, a third measure is used to capture dissolution involving children in wider terms:

- *The proportion of parents that report they are either separated or divorced*, with on this particular measure ‘parents’ defined as any individuals that report they have ever had at least one child and ‘divorced or separated’ defined by the individual’s self-reported partnership status.

This information is taken from the World Values Surveys in which respondents are asked about their marital and parenthood statuses at the time of the survey. The experience of partnership dissolution is only partially addressed through these surveys however, since a separation is not identified when parents have entered into a new partnership.

Key findings

On average across OECD countries, the most common length of marriage prior to divorce is 20 years or more (Table SF3.2.A). Very few marriages last less than one year - in almost all OECD countries less than 1% of divorces come from marriages that have lasted less than a year, with the main exceptions Japan and Korea where around 5% of divorces are from marriages that are less than one year old. In some OECD countries divorces are particularly likely to occur somewhere between 5 and 9 years of marriage – in Estonia and the United Kingdom, for example, around 27% of divorces come from marriages that have lasted 5 to 9 years, while in most of the Nordic OECD countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) this rises to 28% of divorces. In most OECD countries, however, divorces most commonly come from marriages that are at least 20 years old.

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); Marriage and divorce rates (SF3.1); and, Cohabitation rates and prevalence of other forms of partnership (SF3.3).

Table SF3.2.A. Distribution of divorce by duration of the marriage, 2012^a

	Duration of marriage before divorce (%):						Not stated
	Less than 1 year	1 to 4 years	5 to 9 years	10 to 14 years	15 to 19 years	20+ years	
Australia	0.0	18.7	23.2	17.2	13.4	27.6	..
Austria	0.3	20.0	25.8	15.9	13.6	24.5	..
Belgium	0.0	16.1	23.5	17.0	14.0	29.4	..
Canada	0.2	18.1	22.6	17.7	14.1	27.3	..
Chile	0.7	8.0	11.8	17.3	13.5	39.2	9.5
Czech Republic	0.2	15.0	21.2	16.6	14.6	30.4	..
Denmark	0.3	18.8	27.8	20.0	14.4	17.8	..
Estonia	0.5	21.3	27.1	13.3	10.8	26.9	..
Finland	0.1	24.2	26.8	16.1	11.5	21.2	..
France	0.1	12.4	24.5	19.4	13.8	29.8	..
Germany	0.0	11.9	25.4	19.2	14.9	28.7	..
Greece	0.0	16.2	24.2	19.5	14.6	23.8	1.7
Hungary	0.2	13.8	23.1	17.7	15.3	29.9	..
Iceland	0.6	18.4	27.5	19.8	12.4	20.9	..
Ireland	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Israel (b)	2.9	23.2	19.1	13.4	9.1	17.8	14.6
Italy	0.0	0.3	16.2	21.6	19.9	42.0	..
Japan	6.2	26.4	20.9	14.0	10.2	16.0	6.2
Korea	4.9	21.9	19.0	15.2	14.2	24.8	..
Luxembourg	0.4	12.9	28.0	18.5	16.9	23.4	..
Mexico	0.3	22.0	22.3	18.2	12.8	23.4	1.0
Netherlands	0.4	17.8	22.2	18.4	13.8	27.5	..
New Zealand	0.0	11.8	23.8	18.6	14.7	31.1	..
Norway	0.0	13.3	27.6	20.1	13.5	21.7	..
Poland	0.1	17.3	22.6	16.7	13.7	29.6	..
Portugal	0.6	12.8	19.5	19.0	15.3	32.5	..
Slovakia	0.2	12.5	20.4	16.9	16.6	33.5	..
Slovenia	0.2	14.7	18.2	16.0	13.8	37.1	..
Spain	0.3	13.6	22.8	17.4	14.0	32.0	..
Sweden	0.5	28.8	27.9	14.3	9.3	18.4	..
Switzerland	0.2	12.0	26.8	18.3	13.9	28.8	..
Turkey	1.1	29.0	25.6	15.6	11.8	16.6	..
United Kingdom	0.0	15.2	27.4	18.7	13.4	25.3	..
United States	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
OECD-27 average	0.4	16.4	23.9	17.6	14.0	27.3	..
Bulgaria	0.2	19.5	24.3	15.4	12.8	27.9	..
Croatia	0.6	16.3	22.6	16.8	15.0	28.7	..
Cyprus (c,d)	3.8	28.5	25.2	15.4	9.6	17.5	..
Latvia	0.9	16.6	28.6	12.7	10.9	30.3	..
Lithuania	0.9	19.1	23.5	13.0	12.2	31.2	..
Malta	0.0	0.0	4.8	35.7	9.5	50.0	..
Romania	0.6	23.2	24.9	16.6	12.5	22.2	..

a) Data for Canada refer to 2004, for Greece to 2005, for Cyprus to 2009, for Chile and Israel to 2010, and for Australia, France, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand Romania, and the United Kingdom to 2011

b) 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.

c) 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".
 d) 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.

Source:

[for Australia, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico and New Zealand, United Nations Demographic Yearbook for all other countries, Eurostat](#)

Table SF3.2.B shows that in a large majority of OECD countries more than half of the divorces legislated involve at least one dependent child. The proportion is largest in Luxembourg, the Slovak Republic and Portugal, where around two-thirds or more of divorces involve dependent children. In most countries, around a quarter or more of divorces are granted to partners with one dependent child. However, in general, the risk of divorce decreases with family size.

Table SF3.2.B. Distribution of divorce by number of children involved, 2007 (or latest year available^a)

	Proportion (%) of divorces					
	Divorces not involving children	Divorces involving children:			Unknown	
		Total	1 child	2 children		3 or more children
Australia	50.7	49.3	18.5	21.2	9.6	..
Austria (b)	42.5	57.5	23.5	25.3	8.7	..
Czech Republic	40.9	59.1	33.2	23.1	2.8	..
Estonia	47.4	52.6	34.5	15.0	3.1	..
Finland (c)	36.6	63.4	22.1	26.1	15.3	..
France (d)	42.6	57.4	24.4	23.6	9.4	..
Germany	51.0	49.0	26.4	18.1	4.6	..
Greece	29.7	61.4	27.4	27.4	6.6	8.9
Hungary	39.5	60.5	32.8	20.8	7.0	..
Iceland	39.8	60.2	23.5	25.0	11.7	..
Italy	62.9	37.1	26.8	9.3	0.9	..
Japan (e)	43.2	56.8	26.7	22.3	7.8	..
Korea (f)	38.8	60.7	26.8	29.6	4.4	0.5
Luxembourg	33.6	66.4	25.4	29.4	11.6	..
Mexico	24.3	58.4	28.6	20.7	9.2	1.8
Netherlands	43.8	56.2	20.3	26.8	9.2	..
New Zealand	55.3	44.7	18.0	19.3	7.5	..
Norway (g)	43.8	56.2	23.3	23.8	9.0	..
Poland	38.7	61.3	39.3	17.5	4.4	..
Portugal	29.5	70.5	39.5	24.9	6.2	..
Slovak Republic	34.3	65.7	38.5	22.5	4.7	..
Slovenia	48.5	51.5	27.0	22.0	2.5	0.0
Spain	44.9	49.0	31.8	15.1	2.0	6.1
Sweden	42.7	56.6	23.4	22.9	10.3	0.7
Switzerland	54.9	45.1	21.8	18.7	4.6	..
Turkey	43.5	56.5	23.3	19.5	13.7	..
United Kingdom	32.0	54.6	21.9	23.0	9.7	..
OECD-27 average	42.1	56.2	27.0	22.0	7.3	..
Bulgaria (h)	48.0	52.0	39.1	12.0	1.0	..

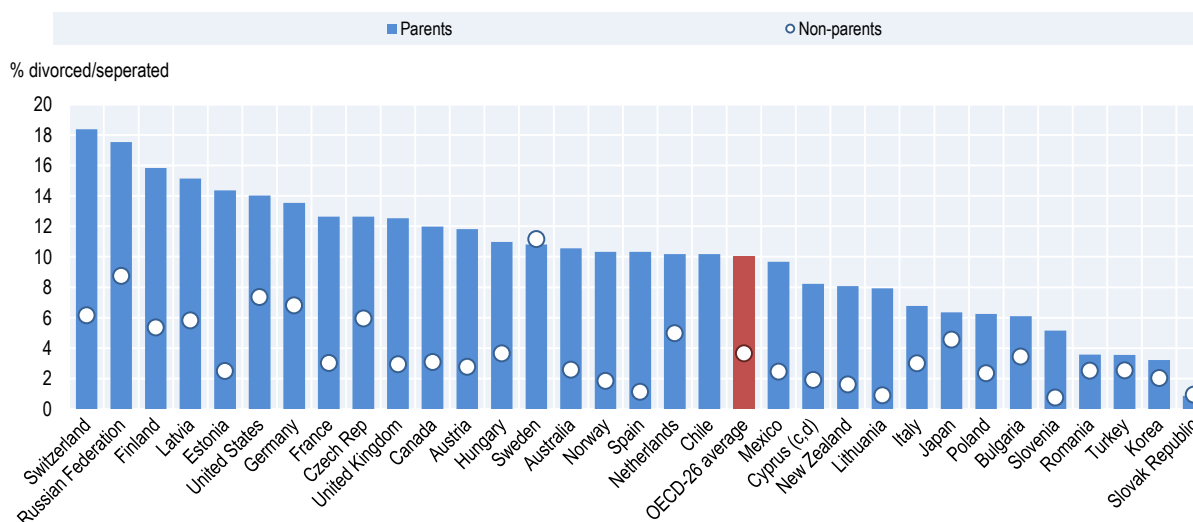
	Divorces not involving children	Proportion (%) of divorces				Unknown
		Total	Divorces involving children:			
			1 child	2 children	3 or more children	
Croatia	41.8	58.2	32.5	20.8	4.9	..
Cyprus (i,j)	51.2	48.8	26.9	17.5	4.4	..
Latvia	41.8	58.2	41.4	14.1	2.7	..
Lithuania	37.3	62.7	41.9	17.3	3.5	..
Romania	52.1	47.9	35.3	10.6	1.9	..

- a) Data for Cyprus, France, Korea and Italy refer to 2006, for Greece and Spain to 2005, and for Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom to 2003
 b) For Austria, non-nationals temporarily resident in the country are excluded
 c) For Finland, nationals temporarily outside the country are included
 d) For France, data excludes overseas departments
 e) For Japan, data refer to Japanese nationals in Japan only.
 f) For Korea, dependent children are children under 20 years of age. Data exclude foreign armed forces personnel, foreign civilians employed by foreign armed forces, and foreign diplomatic personnel and their dependants
 g) For Norway, data exclude Svalbard and Jan Mayen Island
 h) For Bulgaria, nationals outside the country are included but non-nationals in the country are excluded.
 i) see note c to Table SF3.2.A
 j) See note d) to Table SF3.2.A

Source:
[for all countries, United Nations Demographic Yearbook](#)

Chart SF3.2.A shows that across almost all OECD countries parents are more likely to separate or divorce than adults that do not have children. The difference is very small, however, in countries on the right hand side of the chart – Japan, Korea, Turkey and the Slovak Republic – where divorce rates remain low regardless of parenthood status.

Chart SF3.2.A. Proportion of parents^a and non-parents (16+) that are separated or divorced, latest available year^b

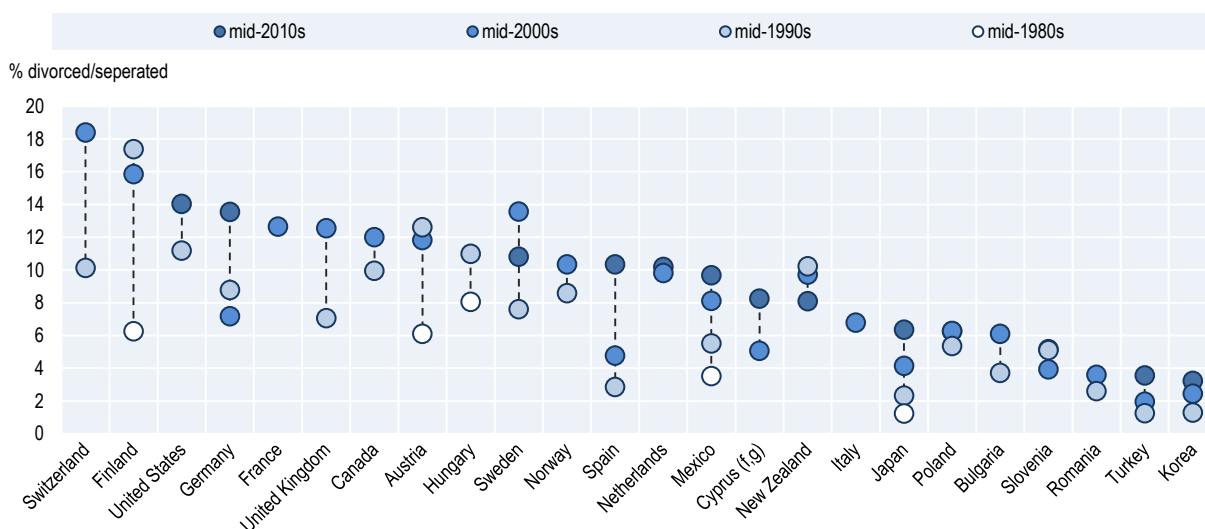


- a) 'Parents' are those who report at least one child when asked the question 'Have you had any children?'. Those who report that they have not had any children are classified as 'not a parent'.
 b) Data for the Slovak Republic refer to 1998, for Latvia and Lithuania to 1999, for Austria, Finland, Italy, and Romania to 2007, for Bulgaria, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom to 2006, for Switzerland to 2007, for Japan and Korea to 2010, Chile, Cyprus, Estonia, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United States to 2011, for Australia, Mexico, the Netherlands and Poland to 2012, and for Germany to 2013.

c) See note c) to Table SF3.2.A
 d) See note d) to Table SF3.2.A
 Source: [World Values Survey, various waves](#)

The proportion of parents that are divorced or separated has increased across many OECD countries since the mid-1980s or mid-1990s (Chart SF3.2.B). Increases have been particularly large in Switzerland and Finland, although in the latter case the proportion of parents that report they are separated or divorced has fallen back slightly since the mid-1990s. New Zealand has seen the proportion of parents that report they are separated or divorced fall between both the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, and the mid-2000s and the early 2010s.

Chart SF3.2.B. Proportion of parents^a (16+) that are separated or divorced, various years^b



a) 'Parents' are those who report at least one child when asked the question 'Have you had any children?'. Those who report that they have not had any children are classified as 'not a parent'.
 b) Data for Japan refer to 1981, for Hungary to 1982, for Austria, Finland and Mexico to 1990
 c) Data for Spain refer to 1995, for Austria, Bulgaria, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and Turkey to 1996, for Hungary and New Zealand to 1998, for Germany, Poland, Romania and the United States to 1999, and for Canada, Finland and Japan to 2000
 d) Data for Korea refer to 2001, for New Zealand to 2004, for Finland, Italy, Mexico, Romania and Slovenia to 2005, for Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom to 2006, and for Spain, Switzerland and Turkey to 2007
 e) Data for Japan and Korea refer to 2010, Chile, Cyprus, Estonia, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United States to 2011, for Australia, Mexico, the Netherlands and Poland to 2012, and for Germany to 2013.
 f) See note c) to Table SF3.2.A
 g) See note d) to Table SF3.2.A
 Source: [World Values Survey, various waves](#)

Comparability and data issues

The data on divorces reported in tables SF3.2.A and SF3.2.B are derived from civil registers of divorces, as recorded by Eurostat and in the UN Demographic Yearbook. Divorce, like marriage, is a legal event, and this has implications for international comparability of data. Divorce has been defined, for statistical purposes, in terms of the laws of individual countries. However, the laws pertaining to divorce vary considerably from one country to other, and this variation also affects the incidence of divorce, which is relatively low in countries where divorce decrees are difficult to obtain. In some countries (Hungary), annulments and/or legal separations may be included in the data, but their incidence is low.

Data on divorces by number of children for Belgium and Canada are available in the UN *Demographic Yearbook* but have not been reproduced in table SF3.2.A because of comparability problems. In Belgium, the total number of divorce is estimated but the involvement of children is frequently

unknown. In Canada, the involvement of children is identified only if the care arrangements are stipulated by the Court.

The World Values Survey (WVS) is a worldwide network of representative national surveys carried out in 97 societies covering almost 90 percent of the world's population. Six waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2014. The last wave was carried out over the 2010-2014 period. Sample sizes in OECD countries vary from approximately 1000 individuals in Chile, Korea, New Zealand, and Poland to around 2000 in Mexico and Germany and 2500 in Japan. The limited sample size may affect the consistency of time series derived from this survey.

Sources and further reading: Andersson G. 2002, Children's experience of family disruption and family formation: Evidence from 16 FFS countries, *Demographic Research* 7(7), 343-347; Garib G, Th. Martin Garcia, J. Dronkers (2007), "Are the effects of different family forms on children's' education performance related to the demographic characteristics and family policies in modern societies?", in Moerbeek H., A. Nierhof, J. VAN Ophem *Changing families and their lifestyle*, Wageningen Academic Publishers; OECD (2011), *Doing Better for Families*, Paris.